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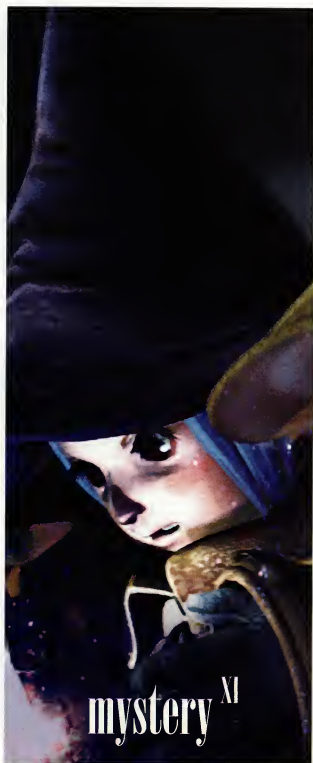


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GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMES

WE LOVE WOMEN

When you think of women in gaming, it's understandable if Lara Croft is the first to come to mind. Her two guns ablazing and crazy acrobatics helped make Lady Croft a breakthrough character, proving women can be just as effective—or more effective—gaming characters than their male counterparts. OK, she was really fun to look at, too.

Though the recurring quality of the Tomb Raider series and a recent box-office flop may have spelled an unscheduled hiatus for Lara, nothing has stopped developers from creating games with strong female leads, the kind of leads who are smart and powerful—and not just candy for the eyes. Which is why you'll agree that this month's cover feature was particularly inspired. Nina Williams, one of the great fighters of Tekken, stars in Death by Degrees, a spin-off game that in a year of spin-offs just may prove to be the most brilliant. GMR's own star, James Mielke, spent a few days in Japan playing the game, and well, he was pretty much floored (or was that the jet lag?).

So consider this issue our tribute to great women in gaming. We love women. We'd like to see more of them in games, taking on strong roles that exploit their powers and abilities—and not anything else.

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Tom Byron, Editor-in-Chief
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fig. 1, GMR'S ANATOMY

fig. 2, Hippocampus

Carrie Shepherd
Managing Editor

Located near the brain stem, the hippocampus controls the memory and emotions of the nervous system. Higher estrogen levels in this area of the brain ensure that no important functions are left unattended and that there is an acceptable balance of happiness and fear.

fig. 4, Appendix

Andrew Pfister
Associate Editor

Its existence remains a mystery to the medical community. Usually, the appendix is mostly harmless and serves no apparent purpose other than to become inflammatory at a highly inopportune time. Healthy life resumes once removed, usually on an outpatient basis.

fig. 3, Levator Palpabrae Superioris

James Mielke
Executive Editor

The levator palpabrae superioris opens and closes the upper eyelid, determining whether people, images, and concepts are worth looking at and paying attention to. Without a properly functioning levator, the body would surely stumble into situations most foul.

fig. 5, Vena Cava

Caroline King
Designer

The superior and inferior vena cava return blood from the upper and lower halves of the body, respectively. The blood flows back into the atrium of the heart, where it is freshened and reenergized, then redistributed throughout the entire body at a rate of infinity phat beats per minute.

fig. 7, First Lumbar

Tom Byron
Editor-in-Chief

Joining the lower spine just below the rib cage, the first lumbar provides critical support to the skeletal system. This not only keeps nervous, circulatory, and lymphatic systems in position, but also provides the appearance of proper posture and respectability.

Michael McCarthy 04

fig. 6, Tendo Achillis

Gerry Serrano
Art Director

Tendy achillis, popularly known as the "Achilles heel," is known for its thickness and strength. This tendone propels the body forward and upwards with great tenacity. However, if it were to ever snap, the entire body would pay the price.

INDESTRUCTIBLE?

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POST

THE FINAL WORD ABOUT GUYS, GIRLS, AND GAMES. FOR NOW.

COME ON AND SAVE ME

Kudos to the Game Geezer for sticking it to game designers over save points. I am sick of spending my money on games that seem to be designed to frustrate gamers. You've been there, too, I wager. After slogging through an entire battalion of enemies and getting within spitting distance of your save point, some hidden character lobbs a grenade at you at the last moment and forces you to play the entire level again.

Replaying a level does NOT make for an entertaining gaming experience! Not to mention the countless times I've wanted to put down a game to do something else, but I can't until I've played another half hour to get to one of the absurdly spaced-apart save points. Here's a message to you developers out there: "Time is money, *%\$holes. I gave you my money, so respect my time!"
—James C.

We've been there (see this month's review of *Pandora Tomorrow*). But we refrain from name-calling, because

we're nice, and because the Ubisoft team consists of great guys and girls. They just like to keep us at the office until late o'clock playing their games.

GUYS AND DOLLS

I agree with Sara in Issue #14 and Kiera in #13. It is stupid that women are so misrepresented and disproportional in videogames.

I understand what you mean when you say that guys in videogames are too buff, but think about what kind of games those are. They are games like *Splinter Cell*, *Metal Gear Solid*, and pretty much any fighting game. It wouldn't make sense to have screwy or even average guys in those games, because for any of those games to make sense, the guys would have to be in incredible shape.

Does a girl have to have a gigantic chest to make it through any game? I think not. Plus, the only reason game developers put big-breasted women in games is to attract more male players;

it's not like they put buff guys in games to get girls to play.

I like your magazine, but you write your articles as if only guys are going to read them, which is not true at all. And if game developers want to make a videogame that appeals to females, they should make a game with a realistic woman who cares about getting the job done rather than looking pretty and cute throughout the whole thing.
—Geneva Lybeck

Even though our marketing department informs us that 95 percent of our readers are of the male persuasion, we do make an earnest attempt to write *GMR* in a gender-neutral tone so that everyone can enjoy and learn,



→ Wardrobe provided by Rikka.

regardless of their reproductive organs. As you can probably tell by our cover this month, we feel that the image of a strong woman, one who "gets the job done," is important to project in the industry. Sure, Nina might be easy on the eyes, but as recent letters on the topic have pointed out, 14-year-old boys don't usually drop \$50 on character and inner beauty. Neither do most 27-year-old boys.

IMPORT/EXPORT BUSINESS

I'd like to step up and say thank you from all the import collectors out there for your write-up on "The Ones That Got Away." It appears that buying imports has become more popular over the last five to six years, but for the longest time, it was unknown to 99 percent of gamers. If you happened to be in that 1 percent, you brought your Visa card and hoped that you had an inside contact who wouldn't screw you. I started collecting imports in 1990. And yes, I am one of



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QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

About eight years ago, my father sat me

down at our kitchen table to talk about "manhood." He said to me, "Mike, there comes a time in every man's life when he begins to have urges directed toward the fairer sex. Sometimes a man will have to say things he doesn't mean and do things he doesn't like to help satisfy these urges. But trust me, son, it's worth it."

My dad then went into what I can only describe as an X-rated sign language demonstration of how various parts of the human anatomy function.

Although that conversation was the

source of many of my most menacing nightmares throughout my early teen years, I think I finally understand the message he was trying to convey....

Nintendo, it's about time you and I sat down to have a talk. There comes a time in every console manufacturer's life when it begins to have urges. It desires a more mass-market appeal to a broader age demographic. To satisfy these urges, sometimes you have to say and do things you don't like—trust me, I know this lesson all too well.

Let's take a look at a few

examples. Remember the time when you decided that the compact disc format just wasn't good enough for you? And do you remember how that two-bit hussy Sony used the compact disc to lure most of your important third-party developers and a large portion of your fan base into their loving arms? You sure dropped the ball on that one, kiddo.

I know this is hard to hear, but there's one last subject we have to talk about: online gaming. This is one area where I feel you have the most

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those people who's paid \$300-plus for a rare, must-have game.

I started collecting imports with a few friends...some of whom you may know: Jeffrey Kibbe, who started Die Hard Gamers Club and then Game Cave, and Dave Halverson, who started GameFan, *Gamer's Republic*, and *Play*.

We learned the sad fact that the ratio of games released in Japan compared to those released in the United States is at least 15 to 1. Sure, some are lackluster, but most are quality games (hence, your write-up).

If I could ask, please include another write-up in a future issue about the others that got away, including *Rakugaki Showtime*, *Alien Soldier*, *Sapphire*, *Yu Yu Hakusho*, *Panorama Cotton*, *Monster World IV*...the list could go on and on. _Trooy Moore

BUT WHAT OF Z-POP?

I thought the brief review on the upcoming Samurai Warriors game was rather humorous, especially when you guys mentioned making Tom Cruise-replicated characters. In that case, would it be OK to make Ken Watanabe-replicated characters as well? However, I was rather irked by the final statement in the article: "J-pop fans should listen for the theme songs by BoA." Wouldn't it make more sense to say "K-pop fans"? BoA is clearly a Korean music artist...and Korean and Japanese music sound nothing alike in style or language. I dunno, maybe I'm overanalyzing it, but the statement seems to almost jump out of the page and say "Korean, Japanese, same thing." Anyway, other than that, great magazine you've got going, really! _Alex

A GREAT DISTURBANCE

I enjoyed your preview of *Republic Commando* in Issue #14, but I'm starting to get very worried. Has anyone else noticed the lackluster quality of

Star Wars games over the past few years? Now don't get me wrong, there are great Star Wars games out there that are definitely worth playing (such as *KOTOR*). But even if you look at your own list (Light Side and Dark Side of SW games), only one out of the five Light Side games (*KOTOR*, duh!) had a release date sometime in this century. That, and most of the games LucasArts has released have just been carbon copies of someone else's game design. *Commando* even looks enough like *Rainbow Six* to disturb me. I just believe that George Lucas' aging imagination is fading away with every dollar he makes, and it terrifies me that everything green and good about the Star Wars universe might very well fade with it. _Aeron McLucas

DEAL OF THE CENTURY

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potential for growth, but I also think it's an opportunity you're on the verge of completely missing out on.

Just imagine the possibilities: an *Animal Crossing* that encourages users to go on virtual online road trips through other gamers' towns, all the while exchanging goods and making new friends.

Or what about a *Pokémon* MMORPG game that not only lets gamers "catch 'em all," but also gives them the option of battling the world's greatest trainers or the ability to join forces with them and set up gyms?

Mario Kart, *Final Fantasy: Crystal*

Chronicles, *Pikmin 2*, *Metrod Prime 2*, *Super Smash Bros. Melee*...the list goes on. I can't even begin to imagine what other ideas you and your teams of brilliant videogame minds could come up with. My teens burn with a fiery lust just at the thought of such things.

I think what I'm really trying to say is, I want to have sex with you, Nintendo. And when I say "have sex," I really mean "play your games online and not have to deal with that cheap excuse of 'connectivity' that you're trying to push-off on gamers with GBAs."

_Tanooki

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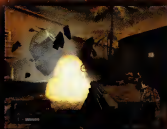
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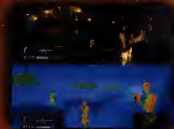
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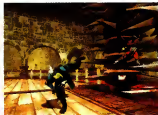


GMR NEWS NETWORK

IN THE NEWS

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→ Clockwise left to right: A hapless mummy gets a rise in *Psi-Ops*; winners DO do drugs in *NARC*; Area 51 gets an FPS makeover; NBA Ballers takes you 1-on-1; MLB Slugfest fires up baseball action; and the new *Mortal Kombat* could be the best MK yet.



MIDWAY'S MAKEOVER

MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION. AREA 51. AND NARC TOP 2004'S OFFERINGS
U.S.A.

For a company that has talked up the importance of original intellectual property, Midway showed a lot of remakes, sequels, and new versions of old games at its recent press event in Las Vegas. That's not such a bad thing when you look at the quality.

Leading the pack was *Mortal Kombat: Deception*, the latest in the seminal fighting series that features online play, the return of weapon-based combat, and multibell stages à la *Dead or Alive 3*. Each fighter has multiple fatalities this time, and many of these act in tandem

with the backgrounds. Even more interesting is the bonus set of side games, each of which could be separate games in themselves—an action-adventure and an *Archon*-style strategy top the list. With this and the sample gameplay we saw, *Deception* could easily be the best MK to date.

Two classic game franchises were on display in their modern-day interpretations: *Area 51* is an FPS, and *NARC* looks a bit like *Grand Theft Auto* meets *Starsky & Hutch*—sans cars. We spotted token references to the classic versions of these games, but you should expect

new-school experiences (unless you're playing the original *NARC*, which we hear will be unlockable in the new version). Midway gets a special "What were they thinking?" award for *NARC*'s use of drugs as power-ups. Need to get somewhere fast? Take a little speed. Need to slow things down? A toke of weed will see you through. Don't even ask what LSD does for you. And no, we are not making any of this up.

The rest of Midway's 2004 lineup consists of the latest evolution of the *NBA Jam* gameplay in *NBA Ballers*; the third *Slugfest* game, *MLB Slugfest*;

Loaded; and an original third-person action game in *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy*, which garnered much-deserved praise for its use of mind control and telekinesis (watch for a preview in the next GMR).

Looking ahead to 2005, Midway finally made the rumors official and announced that John Romero (*Dawkatana*) is working on an ill-named *Gauntlet*. We don't have details yet, but with the recent trend of taking games such as *Mortal Kombat* and *Area 51* online, we wouldn't be surprised to see *Gauntlet* head in a similar direction. **16**

XB

PS2

GC

COMING UP

LIKE A FLOWER!

JAPAN

News is as news does, but some news is better than others. You know this to be true.

First up is a new racing game called *Enthusia*, being developed and published by Konami. The twist to this story is that the *Enthusia* project is being helmed by the former director of the *Ridge Racer* series, and is supposed to look even better than *Gran Turismo 4*. It will ship for PS2 and Xbox; expect to see first details and screens in our next issue, and in the kettle is a sequel to Konami's recent *Teenage Mutant*

Ninja Turtles revival, and it looks like the dev-team learned its lesson; the sequel will have four-player support. Lastly, Tecmo is in sequelmania mode, as it plans return trips to *Fatal Frame*, *Rygar*, and the cult-hit *Deception* series. **1C**



GTA: SAN ANDREAS

ROCKSTAR FINDS A FAULT

U.S.A.

After months of speculation, Rockstar North is headed west in its latest game. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is coming exclusively to PS2 on October 19, and while Rockstar's not releasing any details yet, the official logo gives off a distinctly Californian vibe. Why's that? The San Andreas Fault caused the 1905 San Francisco earthquake. It runs as far south as Los Angeles, though, making SoCal an equally likely destination. **1C**



[BLIPS]

GoldenEye 2 confirmed



It's called *GoldenEye 2*, but EA insists its latest *James Bond* game is not a sequel. It's an all-new console FPS due this fall that explores the darker side of 007's world. You're no suave superspy this time—instead, you're a renegade agent who's been kicked out of M6 and is going to work for criminal mastermind Auric Goldfinger.

PSP delayed

A simultaneous worldwide release for Sony's PSP handheld was too good to be true after all. PSP will hit store shelves in 2004, but only in Japan—North American and European gamers will have to wait until early 2005, so developers can have more time to build the launch lineup. Speaking of developers, Climax (Sudeki, Moto GP) announced it is creating PSP games.

GAMEPORT VITAL GAME INFO. NOW BOARDING.

Arrivals COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
PC	APR	RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS Capriciously avoiding the new Halo expander pack.	🔥🔥
PC	APR	CITY OF HEROES Another excuse to walk around in tighties.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2	APR	UPC; SUOGEN IMPACT As opposed to...gradual impact?	🔥🔥
PC	MAY	STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO The few, the proud.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2, GC	MAY	MEGA MAN ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION Hopefully, they'll include the original Mega Man box art.	🔥🔥
PS2	MAY	ONIMUSHA 3: ODEON SIEGE Starring former Attorney General Janet Reno!	🔥🔥🔥
XB	MAY	METAL SLUG 3 Metal Slug, the old school's salutatorian.	🔥🔥
PS2, XB	MAY	VAN HELSING Why, the name says it all, Van Helsing.	🔥🔥
G8A	MAY	SONIC ADVANCE 3 Is that a hedgehog in your pocket or...	🔥🔥
PS2, XB, PC	MAY	HITMAN: CONTRACTS Tired of killing rivals the old-fashioned way?	🔥🔥
PS2	MAY	TRANSFORMERS: ARMAOA It's 2004, and transforming sports cars still aren't real.	🔥🔥🔥
G8A	MAY	MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG New it's on.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2, GC	MAY	WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004 If there's no pool in L.A., we ain't interested.	🔥🔥
XB	MAY	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS Doesn't give you an excuse to steal, it.	🔥🔥
PS2, XB	JUNE	ORIV3R See how that "3" kinda looks like an "E"?	🔥🔥🔥
XB	JUNE	FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR The many, the proud.	🔥🔥🔥

Departures OUT NOW

SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
GC	METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES Big Boss would be so proud of you two...	9/10
PS2	LIFELINE "Return" "Score"	6/10
GC	HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE Working title: Rural Wisconsin Simulator.	8/10
PS2	ORAKENGARO Oddly enough, working title: Rural Wisconsin Simulator.	6/10
PS2	FIREFIGHTER F.D. 18 Video game equivalent of Backdraft: No Baldwins, though!	5/10
GC	POKEMON COLOSSEUM Forget catch—can anyone even name 'em all anymore?	8/10
PS2	CY GIRLS Because nondescript hallways are exciting!	6/10
GC	PSO EPIQUE III: C.A.R.D. REVOLUTION Slow but oddly addictive. Especially online.	6/10
PS2	ONIMUSHA: BLADE WARRIORS Please, please, please no Onimusha Kart.	7/10
PS2, XB, GC	JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING This still doesn't excuse The Man With the Golden Gun.	8/10
PS2	NIGHTSHADE Girls can be ninjas, too, ya know.	7/10
G8A	OIGIMON RACING About time somebody raced some Ogimons!	6/10
XB	COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04 Great rally action at a great retail price. Sadly, no Ogimons.	7/10
PS2, XB	MAFIA Like The Sopranos, only without all the mind games.	7/10
PS2, XB, GC, PC	WORMS 30 Messier than a sidewalk after a thunderstorm.	5/10
PS2	ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS IX All 14 of you Romance fans will be pleased.	7/10

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MARK MACDONALD

BIRD, YO

➔ All right, Mark, you say, we aren't paying you to sit around and grouch about Nintendo every month—let's hear something positive. To which I say, but you aren't paying me, who uses the word "grouch" anyway, and you're not the boss of me! But then I also say, you're right. So this month, I dedicate my column to something beautiful that's uniquely Nintendo: the WaveBird.

Before the Bird, wireless controllers were big, ugly, clunky monsters. Now...well, actually, they're mostly still like that. But that's the point—the WaveBird is the glorious exception. It's light, it's comfy, and it works from like 8,000 feet away, even without a direct line of sight. Hell, it even comes with its own batteries. I still start to set it down to get the phone or grab a drink before realizing I can just keep playing, which I do, after a short prayer thanking God for this wondrous creation. In my old studio apartment, I had it even better: Using a Zelda-dungeon-puzzlelike combination of carefully angled mirrors, even going potty didn't slow me down (and people wonder why I'm still single). Sony and Microsoft: Time to wake up and, as I believe the kids like to say, smell the delicious meal Nintendo has cooked. ☛

Mark MacDonald is executive editor at Electronic Gaming Monthly.

[TALENT]
* CHRISTIAN ALLEN
THE GHOST BEHIND GHOST RECON

➔ Be very quiet. Avoid all detection. This month, Talent dons its camo and chats with *Ghost Recon* director Christian Allen about his military background, killing your enemies, working with Tom Clancy, and what's up next for the *Ghost Recon* series.

GMR: What is your military background?

CA: I served for four years of active duty in the U.S. Marine Corps. After my tour, I served an additional four years as a National Guard serviceman in both the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Army. My service was in the military police field, including field MP and garrison (law enforcement/security duty).

GMR: Some of *Ghost Recon*'s levels can be completed without killing any enemies. Considering your own military experience, is this a realistic aspect of real-world covert operations?

CA: Every military mission has a different objective, and many times, those objectives don't involve directly engaging the enemy, especially in reconnaissance and Special Forces units. One of the

things that sets *Ghost Recon* apart from other

military shooters is the realistic tactical element that focuses on maneuverability and precision over a run-and-gun shooting



➔ Allen is holding the civilian version of the Spanish CETME Model C, the precursor to the M16 assault rifle. It fires the 7.62x51mm NATO round from a 20-round magazine.

style, and sometimes this means that the best approach to completing the mission is to avoid direct engagements. Of course, intense firefights are sometimes inevitable.

GMR: Many gamers have complained about the reticule-only first-person perspective. Will future versions of the game show the player's weapon and/or offer a third-person perspective?

CA: While I can't comment on any specifics, we are constantly exploring innovative options for our games, and I think that gamers will be pleasantly surprised with the solutions they see in future titles. Being a firearms expert and collector, I am personally really excited about the great weapons features we are exploring for upcoming titles.

GMR: What's it like to work with Tom Clancy? Is he involved in the games?

CA: We have to submit all of the *Clancy* games to Tom Clancy. He then must approve each one, including the stories. After all these years, our relationship is very smooth.

GMR: What's up next for the *Ghost Recon* series?

CA: We have a lot planned for the *Ghost Recon* franchise, with more of what our fans love, as well as lots of new and exciting things.

GMR: There might be some *GMR* readers out there who would love to take you on. What's your online call sign? And on which service can you be found?

CA: I go by the online handle of "Serellan," and I generally play on the Ubi.com service. I try to get in some online *Ghost Recon* at least once a week to check out what people are playing and to enjoy some of the great games people are hosting. ☛

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JOHN DAVISON

DEAR SONY

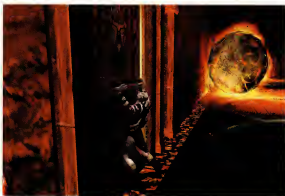
➔ PLEASE don't say too much about PS3 yet. I know the temptation will be there soon, and I know that the boys up in Redmond are itching to start shouting about something, too, and you'll both have to respond to one another, but PLEASE, PLEASE don't say anything until you're absolutely ready.

The second any more than a whiff of new technology emerges, it ruins everything for at least a year. Developers start splitting their attention between the "old" and the "new," publishers spend all their time working out how to pay the astronomical costs for producing games on the new machine and forget about the existing box, and gamers lose interest because what they're playing on NOW doesn't seem as cool any more.

If PS3 isn't going to arrive until 2006, just let us stew on the idea that there's something new until about halfway through 2005. Then, go nuts. In the meantime, go and build some developer support, but do it in secret so we can enjoy treats such as *Killzone*, *Gran Turismo 4*, and *Metal Gear Solid 3* on PS2—without wondering how much better they would be running on your fabulous new hardware. There's always something better coming down the pipe, but I'm happy not knowing about it yet. ☛

John Davison is editor-in-chief of the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.

XB
PC
PS2
GC



→ Sony's *God of War* is a sort of *Clash of the Titans* gone mad. In it, you play as an unnamed Spartan hero on a quest to kill Ares, the god of war. Lots of blood and edgy references to Greek mythology make this one war to look forward to.



FIRST LOOK

GOD OF WAR

U.S.A.

With the recent releases of LucasArts' *Gladius* and Acclaim's *Gladiator* (not to mention Capcom's upcoming *Shadow of Rome*), the "gladiators are so hot right now" fervor over 1999's Russell Crowe flick has officially trickled down to the gaming masses. Not exactly striking while the iron is hot...good thing Sony wisely chose to avoid that crowded toga party with its new classically themed, *Castlevania*-inspired actioner, *God of War*. Instead, Sony Santa Monica kicks it even older-school by lifting inspiration from Greek mythology [the pantheon of gods that the Romans shamelessly ripped off when making their religion].

God of War doesn't offer the family-friendly, whitewashed brand of mythology you'd find in textbooks, though. Director David Jaffe [the mastermind behind the *Twisted Metal* series] envisions *God of War* as "The Clash of the Titans, as if it had appeared in the pages of *Heavy Metal* magazine." The gods and monsters here are brutally violent, twisted, and dark: The game's overarching plot finds a currently anonymous Spartan hero on a quest to kill Ares, the titular god of war. How does

he intend to kill a god? Only one thing will do the trick—Pandora's Box, reimagined here as a weapon of mass destruction.

This edgy take on mythology also manifests itself in the game's gore-soaked combat. Our hero brandishes an odd weapon—two knives connected by a chain—to creatively eviscerate all manner of mythical beast. Expect to splatter temple walls with cyclops blood, hack limbs from raging minotaurs, and decapitate gorgons amid a splashing fountain of crimson. The gameplay appears to be much like that of Konami's *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence*, with fixed camera angles, two attack buttons, multihit combos, airborne juggles, even magical subweapons. *God of War*'s design diverges, however, in terms of level design. Here, colossal, puzzle-filled labyrinths appear to draw inspiration from recent *Zelda* titles and even platformers such as *Jak II* and *Ratchet & Clank*.

Sadly, you won't be entering this War for quite some time—Sony expects to ship the game in early 2005. ☹

—Shane Bettenhausen

MORE SONY: GT4, KILLZONE, SIREN, AND HOT SHOTS GOLF GET PLAYED IN '04

▶ Sony Computer Entertainment of America recently held a press conference at its Santa Monica, CA, studio to talk about its upcoming first-party lineup for 2004. In addition to the newly announced *God of War*, several other titles were on hand, including *Gran Turismo 4*, *Killzone*, *Hot Shots Golf Fore!*, and *Siren*.

There were scant new details about the highly anticipated *Gran Turismo 4*, though it was confirmed that the game will support the upcoming hard drive (which is packed in with *Final Fantasy XII*). *GT4* will feature an

online arena where up to six players can race against each other; players can also build online communities and carry automotive discussions.

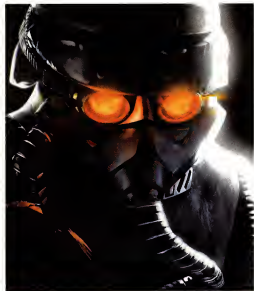
Killzone is a futuristic first-person shooter with several single-player and multiplayer modes, both cooperative and competitive. It looks to have some solid cinematics, with a plot focused on the power struggle between an organization of united colonies and a rogue separatist faction.

The fourth installment in the zany *Hot Shots Golf* franchise, *Hot Shots Golf Fore!* will sport online head-to-head play for up to four players, 15 different courses (including a few minigolf levels), and a whopping total of 34 playable characters. The finished game should also feature a real-time tournament mode that supports up to 30 players on the same course. SCEA hinted that a PSP version is in the works.

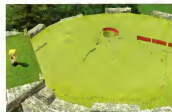
Siren is a survival-horror game, involving—yep, you guessed it—zombies. Or, more specifically, Japanese villagers who are slowly turning into zombies. The story is loosely based on Japanese folklore and unfolds from the perspective of 10 different characters. The protagonists are capable of using a psychic "sightjacking" power to peer into the minds of their undead foes and telegraph their actions; something tells us this is going to lead to some pretty horrific story elements.

Siren is set for an April release, with *Gran Turismo 4*, *Killzone*, and *Hot Shots* to follow later this year. ■

—Ryan Scott



→ Above and below: Guerrilla's FPS *Killzone*, Sony's sort-of answer to Halo, will include multiplayer and online modes.



→ Far left: *Hot Shots Golf Fore!* brings new golfers and courses to the series. Left: *GT4* will an track for a fall release. Above: The eerie *Siren* brings more zombies into the PS2 fold.

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JEFF GREEN

NAM IT

➔ PC gamers who are as old as I am (I turn 112 this October) are probably noticing a very interesting trend in action/war games these days. Suddenly, the Vietnam War is no longer taboo. When I first began gaming last century, there was simply no way this would ever happen—the subject was too raw, too controversial, too emotional, too close to home. Creating a game “for fun” out of something still troubling the country’s conscience so seriously would have surely been a bad call, kind of like making a game out of the 9/11 attacks would be now.

But time heals, to coin a phrase, and now, with more distance and other more active global concerns, the Vietnam War as a game topic feels OK—as the lack of controversy over the slew of recent games on the subject attests. I’ve just spent a couple of weeks playing EA’s awesome *Battlefield Vietnam*, which should be out by the time you read this, and, gameplawise, it is even better than *Battlefield 1942*, which was the best multiplayer shooter of the past few years. But I balked at playing. I’m old enough to remember that war. My parents were peaceboks. I live in Berkeley still and have not strayed far from their thinking. But this game kicks ass. And now it’s OK to appreciate it—as a game. ☐

...Jeff Green is editor-in-chief of *Computer Gaming World* magazine.

XBOX LIVE
ONLINE PLAY TO GET UPGRADED
U.S.A.

➔ The full picture hasn’t been revealed quite yet, but Microsoft has some big Xbox Live upgrades coming this year. Code-named “Tsunami,” this upgrade adds a boatload of new features: a complete clan system that works with any game, competition features for players or developers to control, a new online database for player-created content [so that you can upload and share everything from custom icons to custom maps] and complete MSN Messenger integration, so Xbox Live can communicate with any MSN-equipped PC. ☐

JAPAN FRESH
NEW GAMES FOR THESE SHORES
JAPAN

➔ *Way of the Samurai II* for PS2 tops this month’s list of surprising Japanese games to hit U.S. shelves. Capcom will publish the latest samurai adventure from Acquire (the creator of *Tenchu*) this summer. The original was a surprise hit in 2002, and the sequel delivers an even bigger world of nonlinear storytelling and sword-fighting action.

Sega has puzzle fiends in mind with *Puyo Pop Fever*. Sonic Team’s new and improved remake of the classic puzzle series comes out for Xbox and GameCube this June, although the PS2 version is stuck in Japan.

Square Enix has finally confirmed that the new *Star Ocean: Star Ocean: Till the End of Time*, the first PS2 RPG from the maker of

Valkyrie Profile, is coming to the United States this August, complete with new features from the Japanese “director’s cut” edition. That’s one month after *Front Mission 4* arrives with an all-new installment of Square’s mecha-strategy series. And *Xenosaga* fans can start counting the days again—Namco has finally nailed down a June release for the Japanese version of *Xenosaga Episode II*. ☐

More info at www.iup.com

[BLIPS]

Origin ending

➔ Although it was mostly dead when Richard Garriott and company left in 2001, Origin Systems is now finally and irrevocably gone. Electronic Arts has closed down the studio that once gave birth to *Ultima* and *Wing Commander*, moving the maintenance of *Ultima Online* to its home offices in California.

XBOX
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EVAN SHARNOON

DRIVELESS

➔ It looks like the next Xbox will ship without a hard drive. Flash memory maker M-Systems recently announced that it has signed with Microsoft to provide storage products for future Xbox systems. M-Systems CEO Ronit Moor stated that the devices would be significantly larger than the 8MB memory devices used with Xbox today. Said Moor: “What we’re going to offer for the Xbox doesn’t currently exist.” While it’s not a categorical statement, the news fits snugly into the now widespread theory that the console will indeed be hard-drive free.

Reports circulating around the industry reveal that Software Development Kits (SDKs) for the next Xbox have shipped to developers. According to reports from thenexus.net, the SDK contains IBM processors and features dual Apple Power Mac G5 systems running a custom Windows NT Kernel. The Apple Power Mac G5 is based on two of IBM’s 64-bit Power PC processors and features an ATI Radeon 9800 Pro (R350) graphics chip. [The specifics of the graphics card are likely to change, of course, but this would clarify that it will in fact use ATI hardware.]

And the funniest part? It’s reported that the Apple logo is featured within the application. More rumors as we hear them... ☐

...Evan Sharnoon is an editor at *Xbox Nation*.

[BLIPS]

Elfman scores Fable

Danny Elfman, writer of the toe-tapping Simpsons theme and many classic movie soundtracks, will make his game debut in *Fable*. He's composing a theme for Lionhead's massive Xbox RPG, coming this summer.



Arrivederci Neo-Geo

After 15 years—a longer life than any other platform—it looks like SNK's venerable Neo-Geo is finally dead. The next games in the *King of Fighters*, *Samurai Shodown*, and *Metal Slug* series (in other words, all of SNK's flagships) are coming later this year for Sammy's Dreamcast-based Atomiswave hardware. Meanwhile, a new KOF is coming home: *King of Fighters: Maximum Impact* is due out in Japan for PS2 this summer.

Hori's got soul

Hori, maker of some of Japan's finest game controllers, is finally starting its own operation Stateside, but you'll have to wait to try one of its excellent GameCube pads or arcade sticks. Its first U.S. release? The *Onimusha 3* Soul Controller, a \$100-plus wireless sword controller for Capcom's samurai slash-em-up.



GMR CHARTS

TOP-SELLING GAMES FOR EVERY SYSTEM FOR FEBRUARY '04

TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES Whadd'ya know, you're cool with that GBA thing.	GC	8
02	CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH And we'll keep on fighting till the end.	PS2	8
03	METROID: ZERO MISSION The metroids suck another \$30 out of us.	GBA	9
04	JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING The name's Bond...	PS2	8
05	JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING ...James Bond.	XB	8
06	NINJA GAIDEN GMR hearts ninjas. Ninjas heart GMR.	XB	9
07	NFL STREET Fond memories of Terrell Owens as a 49er.	PS2	8
08	RISE TO HONOR No, it's not a Cialis ad.	PS2	6
09	EVERQUEST: GATES OF DISCORD As if you really needed more EverQuest.	PC	NR
10	MAFIA Finally, a game for Great-Grandpa Soprano.	PS2	7

PS2 TOP 10

	SCORE
01 CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH	8
02 JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING	8
03 NFL STREET	8
04 RISE TO HONOR	6
05 MAFIA	7
06 NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND	9
07 MX UNLEASHED	6
08 BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II	6
09 SONIC HEROES	7
10 WINNING ELEVEN 7	9

XBOX TOP 10

	SCORE
01 JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING	8
02 NINJA GAIDEN	9
03 UNREAL II	10
04 HALO	9
05 NFL STREET	8
06 MX UNLEASHED	6
07 BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE	6
08 GTA DOUBLE PACK	NR
09 SONIC HEROES	7
10 NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND	9

PC TOP 10

	SCORE
01 EVERQUEST: GATES OF DISCORD	NR
02 FINAL FANTASY XI	8
03 CALL OF DUTY	7
04 THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	NR
05 DELTA FORCE: BLACK MARK DOWN TEAM MIA	NR
06 NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: HORDES OF THE UNDERWORLD	NR
07 STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC	10
08 SPELLFORCE	NR
09 BATTLEFIELD 1942	NR
10 UNIVERSAL COMBAT	7

GBA TOP 10

	SCORE
01 METROID: ZERO MISSION	9
02 SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3	9
03 YU-GI-OH! WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP 2004	NR
04 SONIC BATTLE	NR
05 FIRE EMBLEM	8
06 FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE	9
07 POKEMON SAPPHIRE VERSION	7
08 POKEMON RUBY VERSION	7
09 THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT	8
10 MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA	9

GC TOP 10

	SCORE
01 FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES	8
02 MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!	10
03 SONIC HEROES	7
04 JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING	8
05 NFL STREET	8
06 SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE	9
07 MARIO PARTY 5	8
08 NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND	9
09 LUIGI'S MANSION	7
10 NAMCO MUSEUM	NR

XB

PC

PS2

GBA

GC

FUH-FUH-FUH-FOOLIN'!

ALL RELEASE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. SO IT'S NOT OUR FAULT.

SATURDAY

In theaters today is *Envy*, starring Jack Black, Ben Stiller, Amy Poehler, and Christopher Walken, and produced by *Curly Howard*. It had better be good.

09 *The Girl Next Door* or *The Whole Ten Yards?*
Yeah, Not-So-Good Friday

16 Despite the delay, dear readers, our list is still on. One shiny silver dollar says that fall lives in the end. (We're talking about *Kill Bill* 2.)

23 Jennifer Garner stars in the original motion picture *13 Going on 30*, a movie about...about...whatever, it'll probably suck, so there's another picture of Ms. Garner.

30 Get your air horns and grains of sand ready, for tonight is Walpurgis Night. You're going to have to look that one up yourself, because there's not enough room to explain it here.

"9 out of 10 - THIS GAME IS A CHAMPION."- PSM

CHAMPIONS of NORRATH™

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dungeon crawling experience in
the console universe to date."**

- GameInformer

4.5 out of 5 Stars

- Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine

4.5 out of 5

- GamePro

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hack-n-slasher."**

- GameSpy

5 out of 5

- Stuff Gamer

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- WorthPlaying.com



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PlayStation 2



DEVASTATING

WHY SOMEONE NEEDS TO GRAB THE SEQUEL TO OTOGI

JAPAN

➔ In less time than it took the Wachowski brothers to run a golden franchise into the ground, From Software has cranked out not one, but two slammin' action-adventures on Xbox. The first, titled *Otogi: Myth of Demons* here in the States, came out last year with little fanfare. Published Stateside by Sega, *Otogi* gave the Xbox library a much-needed shot of quirk, as well as a karate chop to the cerebral cortex not seen since the launch days with *Smilebit's* love-it-or-leave-it action-shooter *Gunvalkyrie*. Although exotic and beautiful, *Otogi* failed to set afire the hearts of Xbox owners. But ever the champions of underdogs and overlooked classics, we here at GMR relished *Otogi's* every destructive impulse.

Which is why, last Christmas, we scrambled to import its Japanese sequel, *Otogi: Hyakki Toubatsu Emaki*. *Hyakki Toubatsu Emaki* [we'll call it *Otogi 2*] takes the original *Otogi* concept and cranks up the visual insanity to the nth degree. Particle effects [the thick storm of debris you see when laying waste to a Shinto temple with your godlike powers] in this sequel are so over the top, your eyes will literally moisten from exhaustion.

Otogi 2 also introduces five new characters to the proceedings. Noteworthy newcomers include Abeno Seimei, a white-clad priestess whose size and stature belie her immense magical powers; Watanabe Tsuna, a wolf/pig hybrid in humanoid form who generates shock waves with his double-headed spear attacks; and the ridiculous but ass-kicking Urabe Suetake, a warrior made up of an uprooted tree stump and a ship's steering wheel. All six characters feature varying play styles, and the action takes place across 45 different levels, giving *Otogi 2* upward of 30 to 40 hours' worth of supernatural mayhem. And like its predecessor, *Otogi 2* uses the Xbox hard drive to save the decimated states of levels you've already finished so that on return visits, the collateral damage serves as a reminder of your destructive prowess.

But the North American fate of *Otogi 2* hangs in the balance. The first game posted disappointing (but perhaps expected) profits for Sega; it'd be hard-pressed to put itself on the line again for a handful of hardcore fans. Which leaves *Otogi 2*, one of the best Xbox action games this side of *Ninja Gaiden*, without a lifeline here in the United States. However, rumors suggest that some lucky publisher will pick up this potential hit come E3 in May. ☛



➤ This is exactly how a sequel to an action game should be done. More, more, more! Whereas the first *Otogi* only lets you play as one character—Raikoh—in *Otogi 2*, you can pick from six characters, making for destructive good times. Plus, the graphics are better than ever. Like games? You want this.

INTERNATIONAL
REPORT

BEAT THEM UP

SENGOKU VS. GENDAI

● JAPAN

→ A couple of months ago we ran down a few of the best games to hit Japan's Simple 2000 line of budget games (typically in the \$20 range and not a yen more!). Well, feel free to add to that list, because *Sengoku vs. Gendai* (which translates to "the Samurai Age vs. the Modern Age," thanks) might just be one of the best 3D beat-em-ups we've played in years.

Taking a rather generic lineup of modern-day stereotypes [the high-school chick, the sexy female assassin, the sexy female karate expert, the half-naked kickboxing Thai guy, the prototypical *Final Fantasy*-esque leading character, and, finally, the ex-military/how-freelance hitman], developer Payworks has assembled a tremendously fun action game, which, if released in arcades only a few years ago, would have had "hit" written all over it.

Sengoku vs. Gendai puts the player through a series of branching

levels comprised of surprisingly high-quality prerendered backgrounds. Against these backdrops, your modern-day characters cavort, kicking samurai butts, as well as those of the occasional level-ending bosses, such as stage 3's Manticore.

But what makes this game so cool? Well, it's not the animation or high-quality character models, which seem primitive and of a PS1 level by today's standards. It's the excellent control and combo system that makes it possible to link the very first enemy you kill to the last one before you reach the boss. Your rankings depend on how many points you earn, and your points depend on how high your combos go. You can then spend these points on unlockable costumes, extra modes, and a generous host of secrets you wouldn't expect from a budget game. Plus, the character designs have a certain charm to them, and the hand-drawn art rivals some of Capcom's best stuff. **C**



→ OK, so this costume looks just like Nina's from Namco's upcoming *Death by Degrees*. Nyah!



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NINA

The It Girl

GMR offers you an *exclusive look* at *Tekken's* girl wonder in her upcoming solo debut, *Death by Degrees...*

by: James Mielke

system: PS2 // pub: NAMCO // dev: NAMCO // release: FALL 2004

The time seems right for Nina Williams to make her move. After sharing top billing with her *Tekken* stablemates for nearly a decade since the series' debut, the purple-clad Irish assassin is stepping out on her own, taking her unique brand of sleeper-hold tactics, her leather bodysuit, and even the *Tekken* legacy along for the ride. *Death by Degrees* is the name of the game, and it's Namco's first major venture into action-adventure territory. Can a company best known for its classic fighting, racing, and role-playing games hold court in a hotly contested genre populated by such luminaries as *Devil May Cry*, *Tenchu*, *Onimusha*, and in particular, *Ninja Gaiden*? From our recent hands-on playtest at Namco's seaside headquarters based in Yokohama, Japan, we'd say the answer is yes. »



Death by Degrees utilizes an innovative control scheme that allows for easy targeting in any direction. It's flexible enough to seamlessly handle a mix of hand-to-hand combat and gunplay.



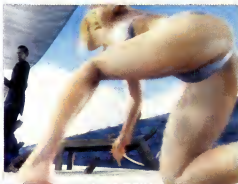
We'll be honest. When we got off the train at the Kanagawa-Shinmachi station, a few minutes' walk from Namco's Yokohama offices, we didn't know what to expect out of *Death by Degrees*. Sure, the screenshots posted on the game's Japanese website looked pretty enough, but for all we knew, the game could have been nothing more than a glorified Tekken Force mode spread out thin over a full-fledged game. Several questions ran through our heads as we made our way past the numerous coffee shops and bunched up against the swirling winds the port city is known for.

We had plenty of reasons for wanting Nina on our cover this month. First, she's a well-known videogame character taken from a highly successful series. However, fighting-game characters are usually—forgive the pun—two-dimensional cutouts, not given much in the way of exposition, so we thought it would be nice to delve into the myth. Second, with the release schedule for the second half of 2004 lacking in strong female leading-role types, the emergence of Nina seemed particularly timely. Third, she looks fantastic in a purple leather jumpsuit, so there's always that.

So, what is *Death by Degrees* all about? Chronologists will be interested to know that the story takes place prior to the first King of Iron Fist Tournament, placing *Degrees* roughly 20 years before the current point in the *Tekken* timeline. At this stage in her life, Nina, a freelance assassin, is



Nina is poised to become videogaming's next great action heroine...



The game features 40-plus minutes of cinematic CG footage and game-engine cut-scenes.

Equal parts *style and substance*, *Death by Degrees* will please both newcomers and *Tekken* veterans alike...



The critical attack allows you to target an enemy's vital organs...and shatter them in *one hit*. When your Focus Gauge is full (usually enough for two attacks), you'll see an X-ray view of your opponent. Hit the part that's *flushing red*.



Then, watch as Nina—BAM!—lays into her opponent *something fierce*, causing organs to *hurt* and bones to *snap* like twigs. Anyone she *hammers* with a critical attack *does not get up again*.

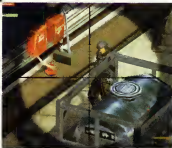


recruited by Britain's MI6 secret-intelligence service. MI6 had sent in an agent to infiltrate the ocean cruiser *Amphritite* in order to uncover the nefarious plots and dealings of the ship's owner, ivory-haired beauty Lana Lei. The agent, however, has since disappeared, and this is where Nina comes in. The *Amphritite* is the setting for—surprise!—a fighting tournament, and Nina enters the competition in order to search for the missing operative. With orders dished out via cell phone (which also happens to function as the game's save mechanism) by MI6 agent Alan Smithee, Nina heads for the boat, and that's where the opening sequence begins. Having won the competition, Nina is found sunbathing on the ship's upper deck. But it seems that Lei's right-hand man, Enrique, can't quite believe this woman bested some of the top fighters from around the world. And so, once the CG movie finishes, Lei sends her henchman after Nina and the game proper begins, introducing *Death by Degrees*' decidedly non-fighting-game-style control scheme.

Like Sony's *Rise to Honor*, *Degrees* puts movement on the left analog stick and attacks on the right analog stick (although the team is keen to point out that they thought of this mechanic well in advance of the *Jet Li* game). The reason for this is that the development team wanted Nina to be able to target and attack any enemy, no matter what their relative position to her. This means that it's not necessary for Nina to face her attacker in order to contend with them. It also keeps the action fast and



The man to the left is M16 agent Alan Smith, who issues Nina her orders, and whom you have to protect during exciting *Time Crisis*-style segments. But in order to do so, you must first liberate the sniper rifle from the unsuspecting thug on the lookout tower (far left).



fluid, as Nina can run, roll, flip, punch, kick, and use any number of weapons at her disposal. Her hand-to-hand attacks, while not as extensive as those of her *Tekken*-specific persona, are still incredibly varied. Besides the default move list (which includes her patented Blonde Bomb), Nina can unleash an especially effective brand of punishment known as her special arts; these attacks include her toe kick, lightning kick, spinning jump kick, backhand slap, as well as the Divine Cannon and her signature submission techniques. These special arts will change depending on whether she's unarmed or holding a weapon. With a quick tap of the D-pad, Nina can use her heaviest metal, including pistols, machine guns, shotguns, assault rifles, swords, tonfa, grenades, throwing knives, and even her doku giri (poison mist). Since each weapon unlocks its own catalog of moves, the number of attacks Nina has at her disposal is substantial.

In practice, the game works great. While the thought of multiple enemies coming at her from all directions might seem like a backstabbing *Dynasty Warriors*-style nightmare, it's not a problem. Whether she's surrounded by one or half a dozen enemies, the antagonist most likely to attack next is highlighted by a discreet tag that says "Active." As he comes closer, all you need to do is press the right analog stick in his direction and Nina will attack. If your timing is on the money, Nina will actually parry his attack, leaving him wide open for a countermove. If you'd rather evade the assault,

The *sniper* sections uphold Namco's arcade-born *Time Crisis* legacy...



Make no mistake:
Death by Degrees
doesn't pull any
punches. When
Nina's adversaries
go down, they go
down hard.



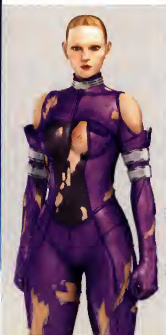
Degrees'
beautiful,
detailed
backdrops
undulate
and pivot,
much like
those found
in *Devil
May Cry*.

moving the left analog stick away the attacker will cause Nina to roll away from him. If the stick is pressed toward her foe, Nina will vault over the head of her nemesis, allowing her to strike from behind. Skillful playing will rack up combo points that players can use to upgrade Nina's various skills and attributes.

Other game mechanics, like the bone-shattering *Rome Must Die*-inspired Critical Arts, allow Nina to target her enemies' specific body parts for maximum damage. Of course, the sniping sections are also good, arcadey fun, with *Time Crisis*-like duck-and-reload mechanics married with *Silent Scope*-style targeting providing, quite literally, major bang for your buck.

And, as the screenshots indicate, the game looks great as well, with highly detailed 3D backgrounds, a camera system similar to *Devil May Cry*'s, detailed character models, smooth animation, real-time shadows, and fast-moving 60-frames-per-second action. The yacht area, which is all that *Degrees'* development team (made up of various industry alumni) is willing to reveal at this point, constitutes only 10 percent of the game.

Ironically, what this promising blend of top-notch gameplay styles and eye-pleasing graphics conspires to create is the coherent, high-energy experience that Namco tried, and failed, to do with the ambitious but flawed *Dead to Rights*. But don't take our word for it. Check it out for yourself when *Death by Degrees* ships for PlayStation 2 this autumn. ~





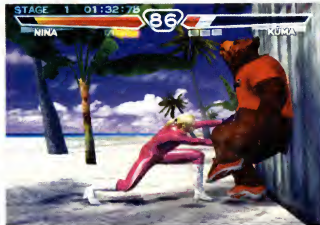
NINA

Retrospective

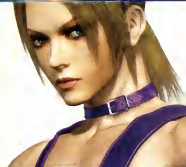
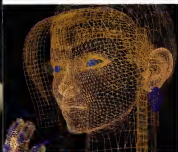
The time seems right for a look back at the life and times of our favorite Irish assassin...

It hasn't been an easy life for Nina Williams, but she doesn't look any worse for wear. That's what a nice cryogenic freeze nap will do for you, even if it is for 15 years, and even if, while in the freezer, you unknowingly give birth to a

bouncing baby boxer (Steve Fox), thanks to the Mishima Zaibatsu Corporation's "experimentation." Plus, Nina's sister Anna is a total jerk, but thanks to the cryosleep, Nina can't remember her! Guess things work out in the end after all. »



Nina was looking pretty good even back in the days of *Tekken 2* (below left), and she was awesome in action in *Tekken 4* (left). Her debut in the original *Tekken* (above) showed that she had great potential, despite being a bit unpolished.



Cryosleep Nina from *Tekken Tag Tournament* (above top) and the more alert but intense-looking rendition found in *Tekken 4* (above bottom) show their stuff. At left is a rare wire-frame view of Ms. Williams from *Tekken 2*.



Nina rocks the red jumpsuit in *Tekken 4* (left), but she catches a beatin' from Paul Phoenix (above) in *Tekken 3*.



The purple jumpsuit makes its presence felt in *Tekken 2* (above), and a glimpse of Nina from the original *Tekken* (left). A little too much mascara, dear.

BEHIND EVERY *Great Woman*

Death by Degrees' honchos talk turkey with *GMR* about the making of *the game*...

Behind every great game lies a development team logging in long hours to make things happen. *GMR* hangs

loose with two of the men responsible for giving Nina her starring role: Producer Yozo Sakagami and Game Director Ryuji Odate. »



Yozo Sakagami (left) and Ryuji Odate (right).

GMR: Where did you get the idea to use Nina in a game like this?

YS: Originally, this was designed as an action-adventure game that featured a female character, but we didn't have any plans for Nina at that point. But in giving the ideas to the designers, we said, "Picture Nina as the kind of woman we want." Even then, we hadn't really thought of using her. We just wanted a woman like her. Finally, we thought, "If we want someone like Nina, why not just use Nina?"

GMR: Did choosing her change the focus of the gameplay?

YS: Yeah, especially the hand-to-hand fighting parts. Since it is Nina, we thought fans would most appreciate her throws and submission holds, so we focused a lot more on that than we had planned at first. The story was also greatly influenced by her. We wanted to go back to what happened to Nina before *Tekken*, to go back into the past.

GMR: Who makes up the bulk of the development team?

YS: We have some of the animation staff from the *Tekken* and *Soul Calibur* teams, and some staff that comes from the arcade division of Namco. We also have some people who previously worked on *Resident Evil* and some on Sony's *Extermination*. The character designer is Roberto Ferrari, who previously worked with Tatsunoko [*Gatchaman*].

GMR: Why did you have an Italian artist do the designs for *DBD*?

YS: Well, Nina is a white character, and as you can see with games like *Final Fantasy*, when Japanese artists try to design white women or whatever, [the characters] kind of turn Japanese in their facial features and just the way they look, generally. And we didn't want that with Nina. We

thought that Roberto could do a better job with that.

GMR: What was the most challenging part about trying to design this game?

YS: One of the challenges is that at Namco, we didn't have a previous action-adventure game or franchise. We had to start it from the ground up, as well as assemble a staff that was capable of making a game like this possible. I had to take people from all kinds of different projects. I was also in charge of scenarios and storyboards for this project.

GMR: Does *DBD* have a Hollywood-style ending or a French movie kind of ending?

YS: (Laughs) Super-Hollywood!

GMR: Since this game is related to the *Tekken* franchise, has there been any consultation with [*Tekken* director] Matsushiro Kimoto?

YS: Yes, there has been quite a lot of consulting. Because it is part of the *Tekken* franchise, we didn't want to do anything with the Nina story line without the *Tekken* team's approval.

GMR: Give us some examples of what kind of input the *Tekken* team offered.

YS: The *Tekken* team didn't like the voice actor we chose for one of the *Tekken* characters. So we took their advice and changed the voice actor.

GMR: So then we can expect to see at least one other person from the *Tekken* universe appear in this game.

YS: (Laughs) We knew you'd catch that! Yes, you can look forward to that.

GMR: What other sort of feedback did they offer?

YS: There was a lot of advice regarding the animation of Nina, as

in "No, Nina's attacks should be much quicker" or "Those kicks should have more snap to them." So we fixed that up.

GMR: Does *DBD* use a revamped *Tekken* Force engine, or was this designed just for this title?

YS: We made it just for this game because we needed Nina to be able to fight multiple enemies, so we built this engine from the ground up.

GMR: Where did you come up with the critical-hit idea? Was this inspired by the scenes in *Romeo Must Die*?

YS: Of course, the movie did have some influence. But basically, in other fighting games, you are attacking your opponents, but you can't see the damage actually occurring. For example, when a boxer gets hit on the chin, his brain physically shakes and he gets knocked out, but you can't see that going on. So we wanted to actually show the effects of the attacks.

GMR: Like the exploding ribs?

YS: Hearts and stuff like that.

GMR: You guys are real sweethearts!

YS: I hope that players—given the variety of moves, fighting styles, and dynamic patterns—really enjoy the new direction this has taken compared with the *Tekken* series. I hope they really enjoy this game.

GMR: If you did another game like this, which other character would you like to use? We'd like to see a game with Yoshimitsu.

YS: Well, since Nina is a woman, I would like to make a game with a male character, maybe someone like [*Tekken 4*'s] Steve Fox. Or actually, my favorite character is Paul Phoenix. I'd like to do something with him. ~



The GREAT WOMEN of Gaming

It's not all overstuffed corsets and John Woo-style shootin'. GMR celebrates some of gaming's greatest heroines...

Nina is obviously very dear to our hearts, but the game industry has produced more than a fair number of proud female characters who don't necessarily subscribe to the Over-Endowment Conspiracy (read: Lara Croft). Keeping in that spirit, we at *GMR* present a few of our favorite heroines who have, over the years, in one way or another, brought presence, strength, beauty, and grace to our favorite pastime. Behind every great game indeed.... »



1 Yorda

Stand by your man

Interestingly enough, the eponymous hero of Sony's *Ico* (PS2) spends the majority of the game leading the frail, almost ghostly Yorda by the hand, protecting her from the murky, malevolent creatures that would steal her away. But at key moments, Yorda reveals her true character, most notably when she saves Ico from falling off a drawbridge and when she sets our unconscious hero off to sea in a tiny rowboat at game's end as their castle environment crumbles around them.



4 Taki

Silent sai

With ninja games all the rage now, you'd think the time was right for *Soul Calibur*'s demon-slaying hottie to get her own moment in the spotlight. But until such time, her sai-slashing maneuvers in *Soul Calibur II* will have to suffice.



5 Nina

The other Nina

The anchor of Capcom's flagship RPG series, Nina is always cast as the angelic healer, but never more so vulnerably than in the moving *BOF: Dragon Quarter*. Even with tattered wings and virtually no dialogue, her presence is still felt.



(Metroid)

2 Samus

Emancipation in space

She's been kicking around the galaxy for more than 18 years now, but this gal simply gets better with age. In fact, back in 1986, gamers didn't even realize Samus was a woman until they'd finished *Metroid* a few times over, with each completion peeling away yet another layer of her famous spacesuit.



3 Aoi

A silky-smooth kick to the mouth

When *Virtua Fighter 3* made its first appearance as a tech demo in early 1996, it did so by introducing the young Aoi Umenokouji as she spun gracefully across the screen, paper fan in hand. Since then, she's been stunning gamers worldwide with her high kicks and graceful backhand slaps.



6 Chun Li

The original hotstepper

Another veteran of scene, Chun Li's helicopter-kicking ways have been in remission since the disappearance of the *Street Fighter* series. We're hoping for a revival at some point, but with 2D fighting games taking a back seat to survival-horror, it's anyone's guess when she'll be back.



7 Lulu

Moogles authority

You can keep the dizzy teen jailbait whom Square resurrected for *FFX-2*, thanks. We'll take *FFX*'s sultry, doll-hugging, goth mama any day of the week. Amidst a sea of uneven voice acting, Lulu's calming presence helps keep us afloat.



8 Azel

Dragon lady

At first, she's encased in stone. Next, she's going bronco on our hero, Edge, from high atop a deadly dragon in this seminal RPG. Naturally, circumstance brings the two together, and while *Orta* provided a tease, we're still waiting for a sequel.

Dear Friends

HOT GAMES MEET HIGH CULTURE AT SQUARE'S FIRST AMERICAN

➔ Worldwide, orchestral soundtracks are nothing new in games. We've heard the London Philharmonic in *Xenosaga*, the Warsaw Philharmonic in *Hitman 2*, and no less than four symphonic scores for EA's *Medal of Honor* games.

In Japan, orchestral concerts are nothing new to videogame fans. An audience first gathered in Tokyo as far back as 1989 to hear the first two *Final Fantasy* soundtracks performed by a full orchestra. In 1991, the Tokyo City Philharmonic delivered an entire medley of 16-bit classics, and the phenomenon has grown from there. This year, in Japan, Square Enix will put on a nationwide *Final Fantasy* concert tour.

Game music isn't nearly the same phenomenon in America, though. Die-hard fans buy whatever soundtracks they can, composers enjoy a cult fandom on the Internet, and amateur remixers share variations of their favorite tunes. But as a

widely enjoyed art form, it hasn't broken into the mainstream...yet.

We'll see just how mainstream game music has become on May 10, when composer Nobuo Uematsu presents the first *Final Fantasy* concert on American shores. The Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles will host the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra and the Los Angeles Master Chorale as they perform two hours of *Final Fantasy* fan favorites selected from throughout the series.

Uematsu is keeping a tight lid on the details of his American debut. "All pieces will be rearranged," he says, but "the set list itself and the details of the concert are secret!" The presence of a chorus means the entire canon is fair game, though, including the series' famous choral themes, "One-Winged Angel" from *Final Fantasy VII* and "Liberi Fatali" from the opening to *Final Fantasy VIII*.



NOBUO UEMATSU'S TOP THREE DEFINING MUSICAL MOMENTS



ARIA DI MEZZO CARATTERE / FINAL FANTASY VI

RPG fans were used to great music on Super Nintendo by the time the third *Final Fantasy* rolled around, but the opera sequence still had the power to become a classic. Although the entire scene is actually composed of four separate parts, the aria—performed by a disguised General Celes—had the most lasting impact by far.



ONE-WINGED ANGEL / FINAL FANTASY VII

3D graphics and flashy cinemas are the most oft-remembered aspects of the first *Final Fantasy* on PlayStation, but you can't ignore its CD soundtrack. "One-Winged Angel," which backed up Sephiroth's final incarnation with an entire chorus, announced just as loudly that Square had stepped into the next generation for real.

SOUNDTRACK REVIEWS

GMR picks the four essential *Final Fantasy* soundtracks that all gamers need in their collection. Music euphoria awaits you.

FINAL FANTASY V

The upcoming *Final Fantasy* live concert draws its name from FFV, although "Dear Friends" is an odd choice of namesake given the piece's quiet, simple style. FFV is much more famous for its strong, momentous themes, such as "The Dragon Spreads His Wings" and the classic "The Big Bridge" (often referred to by the more impressive title "Battle With Gilgamesh"). FFV also features the best Latin remix of the classic chocobo theme, the bouncy "Mambo de Chocobo."



FINAL FANTASY VII

FFVII is famous for many memorable tracks, including the beautiful "Aerith's Theme," the thundering "One-Winged Angel," and the speedy "J-E-N-O-V-A," a new take on the classic battle theme. But its prolusion of great chocobo themes sends out the most. Between "Fiddle de Chocobo" (the bluesgrass version), "Waltz de Chocobo" (the light, classical version), "Cinco de Chocobo" (the laid-back jazz version), and "Electric de Chocobo" (with its surf guitar licks), FFVII features chocobo music for any occasion.



FINAL FANTASY VIII

FFVIII begins with one of the heaviest pieces in *Final Fantasy* history. If "Liberté Fatalis" doesn't get your blood pumping, seek medical attention. Its style settles down nicely after a while, though, building its famous love story with low-key themes like "Waltz for the Moon," until the endgame cranks up the intensity again with the beautifully toned "The Extreme." On the chocobo tip, "Mambo de Chocobo" has a new-wave flavor, plus a guest solo on the Telecaster from Uematsu himself.



FINAL FANTASY X

For better or for worse, FFIX makes its first musical impression with "Other World," the grinding Sammartino-esque metal theme from the opening blitzball cinema. Some fans would have preferred that Uematsu resist the reference to his younger days as a rock 'n' roller, but they had plenty of other tunes to enjoy. "To Zanarkand" sets up the game's framing sequence on a perfect melancholy note, while "The Sending" accents the grim undertones of Yuna's introduction.



SYMPHONY PERFORMANCE

Whatever the specifics, the concert will feature an original set, not just a duplicate of the Japanese tour, and "the requests received by the American fans were greatly taken into consideration," says Uematsu. A live album release isn't out of the question, although no decision has yet been made.

What goes into crafting a live set like this? Uematsu breaks the process down into steps: "First, I select which tracks we want to perform. Then I finalize the actual performance time (how many minutes) and the mood for arrangement. Orders are made to the arranger. The arrangement is made—but I'm not happy. So then I have him do it over. He frets. He's under pressure. He can't eat (an effective diet, I must say). He comes up with another arrangement. I'm still not happy. Repeat these steps until I'm fully satisfied."

In recent years, Uematsu has by and large left *Final Fantasy* to other composers. He collaborated

with two other artists on *Final Fantasy X*, and he left *X-2* to new blood entirely. Perhaps half of *Final Fantasy XI* is his work, and he'll contribute only a single theme to *Final Fantasy XII*, leaving the rest to Hitoshi Sakimoto. But his past career puts him in a very exclusive club—nine *Final Fantasy* soundtracks, superb contributions to *Chrono Trigger*, and a handful of other Square classics.

And it's not like he's not keeping busy. In 2003, Uematsu and five fellow musicians formed their own rock 'n' roll band, producing an album and a series of live shows. Their name: the Black Mages. As you might guess from the moniker, they play rock arrangements of *Final Fantasy* themes, and if they're not quite the RPG fiend's answer to the Beatles, the novelty of the concept goes a long way.

As Uematsu says, "A game is a game, and music is music." Great music is great regardless of where it comes from, a fact that should be eminently clear this May. **D+**

WALTZ FOR THE MOON / FINAL FANTASY VIII

Although it has plenty of competition as FFVIII's most memorable moment—the opening theme, "Liberté Fatalis," and the perfectly timed final boss theme were beautifully orchestrated as well—the waltz at Balamb Garden is perhaps the story's emotional center. It's a much lighter piece than the usual epic blood and thunder, making it a fine contrast to the rest of the game's score. Faye Wong's "Eyes on Me" might have been the official love theme, but the Garden ball made for a slightly more romantic backdrop than a monster-haunted spaceship.



NEXT



WARNING! HAZARDOUS MATERIAL



Here at *GMR*, we preview games a little differently. To ensure that our previews are as relevant as possible, we feature only titles that will be released within six months. We also record our level of excitement about each game with cool little flames. Previews are not reviews—they're merely a guide as to how good a game in progress is looking. They're snapshots. If we're not very excited about a game, it gets one or two flames. If we're taking a wait-and-see attitude, expect to see three flames. Over and above that, you can bet we're pretty excited. It's our duty to tell you what we think at every stage of a game's development cycle—positive, negative, or somewhere in between.

INCOMING GAMES PREVIEWED

PREVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

BLOODRAYNE 2	PC/PS2/XB	066
BURNOUT 3	PS2/XB	071
EVIL GENIUS	PC	060
KILLER 7	DC	074
LA PUCELLE: TACTICS	PS2	047
METAL GEAR SOLID 3	PS2	062
RESIDENT EVIL 4	DC	072
RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS	PC	050
SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI III: NOCTURNE	PS2	052
STARCRRAFT: GHOST	GC/PS2/XB	064



RELEASE | MAY

LA PUCELLE: TACTICS

THE OTHER SIDE OF DISGAEA'S COIN

BY BRYAN PS2 DEVELOPERS: MASTIFF GAMES, CODEMOP, NIPPON ICHI



It's been a good long while since we've had any chronological confusion on the order of *Final Fantasy IV/II/III*, and we'd like to keep it that way, so let's get one thing straight: *La Pucelle: Tactics*, the new strategy RPG from Nippon Ichi, is not the follow-up to *Disgaea*. It came out a year earlier, but due to *Disgaea*'s surprise-hit status, publisher Mastiff is only bringing out *La Pucelle* now. The two games are sort of conceptually related, though: *Disgaea* is all about life in the demon

world, whereas in *La Pucelle*, you're literally on the side of the angels.

The main character is Prier, a cadet from the La Pucelle demon-busting squad. Although she aspires to become the next Maiden of Light, certain elements of her personality, including a hair-trigger temper and an unwillingness to study, can get in the way. Which is not to say determination doesn't count for something: "She gets stuff done and she's in touch with her feelings. I like that," grins Nippon Ichi's Souhei Niikawa.

Like many of Nippon Ichi's games, *La Pucelle* retains certain familiar elements—such as the sprite-heavy 2D look and basic strategy-RPG gameplay—while simultaneously incorporating completely new systems and facets. "We think sequels are important, but for the time being, we are definitely giving priority to trying new things," explains Niikawa. "Starting from zero each time is really hard and causes us a great deal of pain and suffering. However,

we see that extra burden as a key to making great products."

This means you'll have to say good-bye to things like *Disgaea*'s geo panels and the Dark Congress, but in their stead you'll have dark portals and enemy recruitment (see sidebar), so don't think there won't be plenty of intricate systems to play with. "In a lot of RPGs, you hit the guy, he falls down, and that's pretty much it," Niikawa says. "La Pucelle demands a high level of tactics. Dark energy and miracle attacks

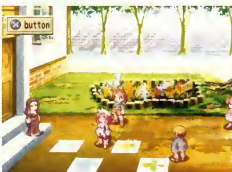


PS2



◀ If God is for us, who can be against? Not too many, if the powers at the *La Pucelle* team's disposal are any indication. Destroy the enemies with miracle attacks like Armageddon and Ragnarok, call down fire from the heavens, or just nail the enemies with one swift kick courtesy of Prier's steel-toed boots.

Unfortunately we don't have any medicine for your kind of problem...



also lend a puzzle-game-like aspect absent from other simulation games.

Another thing Niikawa isn't giving up is the richly animated character sprites. Though developed before *Disgaea*'s large character portraits were brought into the picture, the game still boasts lots of frames of animation and a generous supply of dialogue portraits for every character. "A lot of people seem to think that 3D graphics are just great, but I think

it's easier to develop a character's attractiveness with 2D graphics," Niikawa says. "I think it's really too bad when people say that graphics are of poor quality just because they are 2D. We feel really good about our 2D graphics."

They apparently felt so good, in fact, that the character sprites appear during battle this time out. Also, whenever you engage an enemy, the game cuts to a view in which the combatant with the higher Speed rating will attack

first, meaning you can theoretically be wiped out before getting a hit in, even when you're on the offensive.

If *La Pucelle* is as big a hit as it deserves to be, the future should be bright, not just for Nippon Ichi—which plans to release all of its games in the United States from here on out—but also for the strategy fans who've fallen in love with them. **1E**

GMA SAYS → Your strategy isn't bad, but it's scratched and then some!

→ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥

GO WITH THE FLOW

➔ Most maps have several dark portals open, with rivers of streaming energy flowing from them. If you don't close them, enemies will keep appearing on the map. But don't be too hasty: Redirecting the flow can be turned to your advantage.



The stream changes direction according to which direction characters standing in it are facing, so carefully set up your party to make a circle with the stream.



If the circle is at least 15 squares long and hits at least one enemy, it'll become a miracle attack that's determined by the color of the energy. All enemies within it will be hit for major damage. **1E**



“10 out of 10”

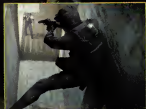
REVIEW CREW, ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY

9.5 out of 10

9.5 out of 10

9.5 out of 10

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RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS

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→ Once you've assembled a massive army of walking armageddon, you'll be heading over to your opponent's corner of the world to stomp a crater in his butt faster than he can say "A-bomb."



➔ Ready for some strategizing? Last year's PC strategy game *Rise of Nations*, masterminded by *Alpha Centauri* Lead Designer Brian Reynolds, is an expert blend of real-time and turn-based mechanics, making for something of a cross between *Age of Empires* and *Civilization*. The upcoming expansion, subtitled *Thrones & Patriots*, adds even more variety to an already flexible game.

The centerpiece of *Thrones & Patriots* is the inclusion of six new playable nations. Joining the roster are the Americans, Persians, Indians,

Iroquois, Lakota, and Dutch—which makes for a whopping 24 nations to pick from. They've all got plenty of attractive gameplay abilities to throw at opponents: The Lakota are capable of constructing buildings outside their national borders (which has been a no-no until now), while the Persians can prolong their game by erecting a second capital. The other 18 nations are receiving their fair share of face-lifts and gameplay tweaks as well.

The other big news is the new Senate building, which is where the

Thrones & Patriots part comes in. By constructing a Senate, you'll be able to choose from among six government types, split between two main branches. These branches basically equate to either democracy or dictatorship, and your choices will confer different types of bonuses and special Patriot units. No need to worry about your nation rebelling against your evil dictatorial whims—peasant revolts aren't part of the plan.

Fans of the single-player campaign will receive some treats,

too—four new historical campaign modes will be available. You can discover the New World, follow in the footsteps of Napoleon or Alexander the Great, or even take control of the Cold War—as either side. So keep your eye on that doomsday clock, rally the troops, and prepare for war, because *Thrones & Patriots* is rising onto store shelves soon! ☛

GMA SAYS → The original *Kicks* ass, and with this expansion it'll take names, too.

➔ HOW HOT...



Private. James Mayberry. 11B Infantryman.

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RELEASE | AUGUST

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI III: NOCTURNE

THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT

DEVOTION PS2 CRASHBURN ATLUS DEVELOPER ATLUS



➔ It's the end of the world, and you're the new Messiah. Sound like fun?

"The antithesis of mainstream fantasy." That's what Creative Director Kazushige Nojima calls *Megami Tensei*. Which is exactly why this series of modern fantasy RPGs has enjoyed 17 years of cult fandom and counting in Japan. It may also explain why it's never seen the light of day in English, but that's changing soon enough. After years of sitting just off most American gamers' radars, a *MegaTen* game is

finally coming Stateside for PS2: *Shin Megami Tensei III: Nocturne*. The title is a mouthful, but don't worry—this game offers much more strangeness to remember it by.

More than a dozen *MegaTen* games have been hits in Japan. The series began in the late '80s, Kaneke says, as a response to the traditional RPGs of the time. *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy* drank straight from the well of classics like *The Lord of the Rings*. Designer Cozy Okada and artist Kaneke (who took over for

Okada for *Nocturne*) wanted to create something set in an almost-real world. "Another thing that bothered me," Kaneke says, "was the trend of the main character always being portrayed as someone special—a legendary warrior, for example. It was the equivalent of saying you can't succeed unless you're from a wealthy family, and I just couldn't stand that. I wasn't born with special genes, and I'm sure most other players weren't, either. No matter who you are, if

you're given a chance and have the guts to try your best, you can become a hero...that became the concept of *Megami Tensei*."

If you've played Atlus' pair of *Persona* RPGs, you may have an idea of what to expect. *Persona* and *Persona 2* took place in a similar world, a twisted vision of modern urbanity haunted by the supernatural. However, "*Persona* was geared toward a younger audience," Kaneke explains. "It had a story that primarily dealt with the main character's



→ Megami Tensei's catalog of demons features designs drawn from nearly every major world religion or mythology. Look around these pages for nods in the direction of Hinduism, Chinese folklore, an ancient Greece, the Judeo-Christian tradition, and, of course, the modern mythology of videogames.



psychology, rather than a broader theme. "Nocturne swings for the fences, kicking off with the apocalypse and going forward from there.

For Nocturne's hero, a high-school student on a class trip to a Shinjuku hospital, a new life begins with a moment appropriately called the Conception. An earthquake strikes, accompanied by a bright light...and when he wakes up, everything has changed. Tokyo is deserted, and the remnants of humanity share the city with wandering demons.

Most of the survivors are unchanged by the incident, but our hero is the exception. A strange design covers his body, marking him as part demon...and someone with a role to play in this new world. As he explores the city and meets more survivors of the Conception, pieces start to fall together: a mysterious cult, a powerful corporation, massing armies of demons, and himself at the center, able to choose one side or the other.

Nonlinear storytelling is becoming more common in RPGs, but few have

aimed as high as Nocturne. As its plot unfolds, your choices help reshape this "Vortex World"—the philosophy that guides your actions leads to a handful of different endings. Want to lead the armies of hell against heaven? You can...

You'll have to raise your own demon army first, though. Like in Persona, there's much more to combat in Nocturne than simply killing everything you see. Director Kazuyuki Yamai explains: "The demons you encounter in this game should not

simply be viewed as enemies. If you talk to them, you may be able to negotiate an agreement." By persuading demons to join your cause, you can create a party of more than 100 different creatures, each with strengths and weaknesses against other demons. You can even fuse weaker demons into stronger ones, crossbreeding them to create more useful allies. "In doing so," Kaneko says, "you can develop an attachment to a demon that was once an enemy." The hero can evolve in



◀ Our hero looks almost entirely normal before the Conception destroys Tokyo. That's intentional—Nocturne's creators wanted to make him as much of an everyman as possible before his transformation makes him a powerful player in the post-Conception world.



many ways as well, consuming magatama that confer different useful demonic attributes.

It helps to have as many demons as possible on your side—Nocturne's Press Turn Battle system stacks the deck in favor of well-prepared players. It's traditional turn-based RPG combat, but not all turns are created equal. Instead, the more effective side is rewarded with extra actions for future turns. If you do well in one turn, you'll have more chances to do better in the next, but

an opponent who gets the drop on you can take the advantage. Learning about a particular area and its native demons is just as important as building a generally strong party.

The complexities of combat and demon development should appeal to RPG gearheads, but Nocturne balances those nuts and bolts with the aesthetic and cinematic qualities of a new-school production. Cel-shaded 3D graphics present Kaneko's designs in a whole new light—the

technique may seem overused in some games, but it suits the smooth, shiny, airbrushed style of his human and demon creations.

That style paints a picture that's just familiar enough. *Final Fantasy* has evolved into something far from its swords-and-sorcery roots, but it's still pretty far removed from reality. *Megami Tensei* is meant to echo the real world with its look as well as its philosophy. "A hard-rock interpretation of Pinocchio" is Kaneko's choice for a high concept,

referencing the adventures of another confused, not-quite-human hero. "[The main characters] mature as they overcome the anxieties and anger they feel toward society. Resistance to society's norms and growing out of adolescence...that's the style of *Megami Tensei*." It's a unique style in games, and you'll be able to experience it firsthand this August. **B+**

GMA SAYS → We're lucky to be getting this game player. Here, we command you to play it.

→ HOW HOT...



REC

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78

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→ Kazushige Nojima has worked on 12 games in the Megami Tensei series alone. "Not only did I help with the character designs," he says, "but I also worked on concepts, scenarios, and settings. In other words, these games are all a part of me."



TATTOO YOU

➔ Nocturne's hero wears his demonic side on his sleeve—and just about everywhere else. Creative Director Kazushige Nojima chose to represent the hero's otherworldly nature with a full-body tattoo. "I could have made him a monster," Kaneko says, "but I thought that was too common. Instead, I overlaid the image of a shaman with the main character's demon-user side. Shamans around the world have one thing in common: tattoos. I believe I was able to portray both the mysterious and sensual appeal of a demon." If that sounds too complex, he sums up the inspiration for the hero like so: "The Red Hot Chili Peppers—I imagined him running around the desert naked." ☛

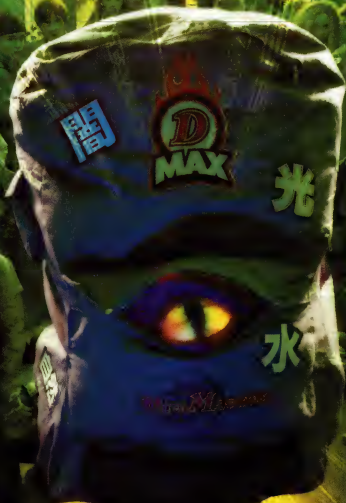


DEVIL HUNTER. DEVIL HUNTED

➔ Nocturne, based on the Japan's director's cut version of the game, includes all kinds of additions: new story elements, a selectable difficulty level, and other features left on the original game's cutting-room floor. What most players will notice, though, is the big-name guest star. Devil May Cry's "stylish hard action" hero is on loan from Capcom in the Megami Tensei world. He fits in pretty well, of course—in a demon-haunted apocalypse, there's plenty of work for a professional devil hunter—and the story finds a compelling dual role for him to fill. Dante can become the hero's friend or foe, depending on whether you choose to walk on the side of the angels or demons. ☛



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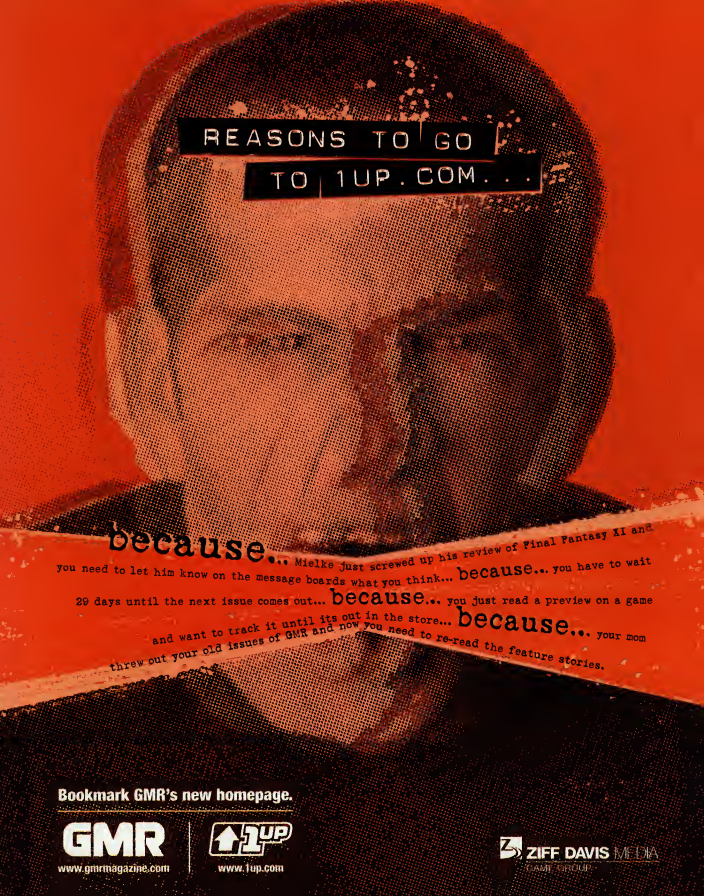
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GAME GROUP

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

EVIL GENIUS

WELCOME TO MY UNDERGROUND LAIR

SYSTEM: PC PUBLISHER: WENDY UNIVERSAL DEVELOPER: ELIXIR STUDIOS



PC

▶ The scene: a nondescript tropical island somewhere in the Pacific. A large hotel-casino resort stands here, making for a relaxing vacation spot. Nothing out of the ordinary, right? Nothing at all...except DR. SIN'S EVIL VOLCANO MOUNTAIN LAIR!!!!

That's right: Beneath all the tourist traps and public facades lies the inner sanctum of a nefarious madman who is hell-bent on ruling the world. Ever wonder what the day-to-day life of a James Bond villain is like? After you've

taken a look at Elixir Studios' upcoming strategy game *Evil Genius*, you'll have a new appreciation for all the hoops these villains have to jump through on the road to global domination.

At its core, *Evil Genius* is a real-time strategy/simulation game vaguely akin to something like *The Sims* or *Ghost Master*. The big twist here is that you take on the role of a wicked, scheming criminal mastermind, assuming control over all his associated henchmen, lackeys, facilities, and technology. You start the game with

little more than a simple, clandestine "inner sanctum," which eventually grows into an elaborate supervillain lair worthy of Dr. No himself.

But of course, no self-respecting evil genius would dare to take on the world alone. That's what minions are for—lots and lots of expendable, nondescript minions. You'll train your faceless lackeys for three types of tasks: Technology-oriented minions will tend to all the meticulous research and scientific details of expanding your base and building all

your cool weapons, while soldiers will act as guards, defending your hideout from bothersome intruders. The third type of minion is the diplomat, who concerns himself with social engineering and diverting some negative attention away from your dastardly doings. Your lair is equipped with a facility to train and upgrade these underlings, with over a dozen different professions spread among the three minion types.

We know what you're thinking, though—minions are nothing but



← Throw me a trickie' bone here! Our evil genius is looking quite dastardly in his underground volcano lair. It looks like a few of his faceless minions are a little too stupid for their own good (er, bad), though. One of your underlings getting on your nerves? That's OK, do what any self-respecting evil mastermind would do—just kill him! Muahahahaahahahahahaha!



cheap, dispensable cannon fodder. What an evil genius really needs for success are a few tough, loyal henchmen, right? *Evil Genius* has it covered, with roughly 12 different henchmen for you to recruit. Muscled Russians, witch doctors, ninjas, professional hitmen—they're all here. Choose wisely, though, since henchmen are much more loyal—and hence, initially tougher to curry favor with—than your everyday minion.

You'll manage your league of reprehensible subordinates from the

confines of your underground lair, while the tourists above—blissfully oblivious to the fact that your extravagant casino resort is little more than a clever front—go about their ignorant lives, unwittingly putting more cash into your coffers. Much of your fortune will go toward the construction of a doomsday device, which is essentially what brings about your ultimate goal of world domination.

As you expand your base and move forward with your research,

you'll undoubtedly draw heat from various world authorities for your infamous schemes. Eventually, you'll have to deal with enemy superagents encroaching on your island, set on ending your wicked ways. Fortunately, you can build plenty of amusing traps and torture devices to end your foes' Bond-like tomfoolery, even going so far as to gloat at prisoners to thoroughly demoralize them and crush any hopes they might have of escaping your vile clutches.

Evil Genius devotes lots of attention

MEET YOUR MASTERMINDS: EVIL GENIUSES AT A GLANCE

MAXIMILLIAN

This guy is a classic criminal genius with "Blofeld" and "Dr. Evil" written all over him. His lack of hair, nefarious-looking jumpsuit, and (we assume) horrible burn scars add up to what can only be described as a textbook case of "sinister."



ALEXIS

This is no run-of-the-mill femme fatale—she'll whip those nameless goons into shape just as well as any other mad dictator. Who says world conquest is a male-dominated line of work?



to small details; a quick survey of a well-developed lair will turn up plenty of amusing sights as your minions go about torturing unfortunate prisoners and conducting trial-and-error research. Plenty of self-deprecating humor and other nice touches are present alongside what promises to be a solid set of gameplay mechanics, which could make for one gem of a mastermind simulation. **B+**

GMA SAYS → In the immortal words of Orson Welles: "Blast it!"

→ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | WINTER

METAL GEAR SOLID 3

TREAD SOFTLY AND CARRY A BIG STICK OF FACE PAINT

DEV: PS2 PUBLISHER: KONAMI DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT DEV/PROD: KCEI



On February 18, 2004, a world-famous game designer slipped unnoticed across international lines and into the United States. The man? Hideo Kojima. His mission? To preside over a rare roundtable event discussing his next game. That game? *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, one of the most eagerly anticipated games of the past few years.

The presentation and subsequent Q&A session focused almost entirely on a single feature: the camouflage index. Once again demonstrating his

passionately thorough approach to game design, Kojima elaborated on exactly how and why this newest addition to the *Metal Gear* School of Stealth works.

The camouflage index is essentially an equation. The player's equipment and environment add up to a percentage: 100 percent equals absolute invisibility. To accommodate the numerous types of backdrops and ground coverings he'll encounter, series leading man Solid Snake must make use of a number of prefab

camouflage patterns, each of which affects the index and can be swapped on the fly. Finding the best match is the key to Snake's survival.

Naturally, it's not as simple as donning the right duds—Snake's stance also comes into the equation. For example, standing in the grass in olive-drab attire results in an index of 45 percent, while crouching and lying down raise it to 65 percent and 80 percent, respectively. Adopting the right face paint also helps, adding depth to that old *MGS* standby:

peering around corners. If properly made up, Snake can peer around trees undetected, even if a guard is approaching him. When questioned about whether the camouflage index would replace the decidedly non-'60s-style motion detection that Snake has utilized in prior games, Kojima stated vaguely that several types of radar would be available—unsurprisingly, no specifics were forthcoming.

Movement affects the index appropriately: Walking and running bring down the index significantly,

WHAT'S THE SCOOP?

While Kojima has already revealed numerous in-game costumes, he's once again going the extra step and giving his many fans a chance to get into the game by submitting their own designs for disguises. These will be sorted into three general categories: effectiveness (sticks and stones, for example), entertainment value (a

rubber ducky scheme was shown), and "cool factor" (uh... *Hello Kitty*?). As with the dog-tag contest that launched before *Sons of Liberty*'s release, this will be an equal-opportunity affair: Gamers from around the world will be able to submit their designs online. Want in? Expect more details to surface this May at E3. **E+**



TREE BARK
WOODLAND



© Not all of Snake's diet will fly, slither, or crawl, according to Kojima: "I respect Mr. Miyamoto, so there will be plenty of mushrooms." Kojima also let slip that he'd discarded one particularly gruesome guise—bloody camo.



while stalking is a good way to keep on the move stealthily. This addition to Snake's already impressive arsenal of moves should make *Snake Eater*—with its emphasis on hunting and being hunted—an even more harrowing experience than its predecessors. But evolution comes at a price: Stalking (and, presumably, running) depletes Snake's stamina. It's been revealed that stamina can be replenished by eating food foraged from nature, but Kojima won't elaborate further on this until E3 in May.

Kojima went on to illustrate the index in action via a prerecorded video presentation. Snake was shown in a variety of settings—including open, sun-dappled clearings, thick clumps of grass, and beds of dried leaves—adopting appropriate attire for each. In the *Metal Gear* tradition, the player will start off poorly equipped; this time around, Snake loses (and must later reacquire) his backpack upon insertion—therefore, pattern procurement will be on-site. While several patterns were shown (including

snow, leaf, fire, tiger stripe, and tree bark), others have yet to be revealed.

Sunlight will play a significant role as well. One particularly suspenseful scene showed two soldiers coming onscreen and heading down a path toward Snake, who is inconveniently caught out in the open. Quickly switching over to black camouflage and face paint, Snake is able to successfully avoid detection by lying in mud that's in the shadow of a tree. Another more lighthearted scene showed Snake clambering into a

hollowed-out tree trunk and then adopting the now infamous crocodile headgear. A guard standing watch promptly freaks out when he sees Snake's snout, running away and leaving the path clear. It's clever, it's cool, and it's sure to be just a taste of what we'll see at E3. Expect secrets to be revealed—and jaws to hit the show floor—this May. **E+**

GMA SAYS → In-game or otherwise, we hate losing sight of our snake(s) in the grass.

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥🔥

STARCRAFT: GHOST

GHOSTESS WITH THE MOSTESS

CONCEPT: GUY PIERRE | DESIGNER: BLIZZARD | DEVELOPER: NINELESTIC



When Blizzard first announced *StarCraft: Ghost* a year ago, you could almost hear the collective eeks of joy from the *StarCraft* faithful around the world. Blizzard's epic real-time strategy was getting a console spin-off that seemed so right: Take one of *StarCraft*'s most powerful units and give it its own game. It was a gutsy move on Blizzard's part, but one that just might be the start of a whole new franchise for the company.

Breaking completely from its RTS legacy, *Ghost* does a turn as a third-

person action game that's a little bit *Metroid Prime* and a little bit *Splinter Cell*. Speed and stealth—and an array of psionic (mind-based) and conventional weaponry—make for a potentially genre-changing experience.

Ghost puts you in the role of Nova, a Terran ghost operative. For the *StarCraft* newbie, "ghosts" are superhuman units bred for their superior physical and psionic abilities and are most useful for espionage missions, using their unique cloaking power to slink past enemies. They can

also call in weapons of mass destruction to target larger areas—they, ghosts might be elusive, but they can also let you know they're there.

In *StarCraft: Ghost*, players exploit these special ghost abilities in a series of espionage missions (Blizzard hasn't determined the exact number yet, but at press time it was "around 22"). As Nova, you'll sneak your way through the game by using a range of psionic powers, including the aforementioned cloaking (careful! enemy units may not be able to see you, but they can hear

you). Psionic sight lets you see pretty much anything that emanates heat, including fresh footprints and units stationed behind walls; and Psionic speed is a sort of power boost that lets you move quickly when needed.

Blizzard hints that a few more psionic abilities are in store for the final game.

Nova's psionic powers aren't limited to stealth. In some cases, you'll find yourself in the midst of a pitched battle from which you can call down any number of WMDs. A situation might call for an Arcite barrage from a



← Yes, you can believe what you're seeing. Nova will even have to take out her own Terran forces in *Ghost*. Certain Terran rogues are harvesting the insect-like Zerg forces, and if you've ever seen the movie *Aliens*, you know that's not a good idea.



division of siege tanks or a deadly battleship salvo of a targeted area. Perhaps your most powerful call-down is the nuclear strike. Once initiated, it's pretty much over.

Nova can access a small arsenal of conventional weaponry that includes a sniper rifle and grenades, as well as some very cool bots that are used for investigation, distraction, and destruction. And in what's bound to become Nova's signature move, the "dangle snipe," she literally suspends herself upside down from wires,

pipes—almost anything—to quietly take out enemy units. Nova can also initiate silent kills—because once in a while you'll have to break some necks.

StarCraft: Ghost is being developed by Nihilistic, previously known for the ambitious *Vampire: Masquerade—Redemption*. Made up largely of former LucasArts employees, Nihilistic was founded by the designers of the original *Jedi Knight*. Ray Gresko is *Ghost*'s lead designer. Blizzard's John Lagrave, veteran of *StarCraft*, *WarCraft*, and *Diablo*, is the producer.

The team is scripting a more streamlined A.I. that clearly informs players what enemy units are up to. The company is also polishing the levels, animations, and interface—and working like crazy to get the game in gamers' hands by the end of the year. In the absence of a *StarCraft* sequel, *Ghost* may be the fix we'll all need. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Blizzard's spin-off is spinning in the right direction

→ HOW HOT...



XB

PS2

GC

RELEASE | OCTOBER

BLOODRAYNE 2

EVERYONE'S FAVORITE SUCCUBUS IS BACK!

DIRECTOR: POPS/AB DEVELOPER: MAJESD CREATORS: TERMINAL REALITY



➔ *BloodRayne 2's* forecast calls for tightly packaged buttocks followed by intermittent blood sprays and occasional saucy quips. The vampiric Rayne, who squashed an evil Nazi scheme in the original *BloodRayne*, moves 60-some-odd years into the future here, battling a terror not seen since the film *Blade 2*: vampires trying to concoct a formula to defeat the deadly effects of the sun.

As the red-and-black-vinyl-clad avenger in this third-person adventure, players get to access a

slew of vampire-related powers, including the ability to recoup lost health by divesting enemies of their sweet, sweet corpses. All of Rayne's powers—including enhanced vision and the ability to slow time à la *Max Payne*—remain intact, and a few new ones are thrown in.

Bloodstorm causes foes to explode, presumably in a maelstrom of blood. *Ghost Feed* lets Rayne project herself from her body to gain energy from an enemy, and temporary allies can be forcibly recruited after being

partially drained of their life force. In addition, special and gruesome fatalities such as *The Cleave* and *Stab and Behead* have been added to our heroine's repertoire, accessible after a victim's blood has been wholly removed.

A huge city serves as *BloodRayne 2's* gory playground, and Rayne's family, including her hated father, Kagan, are the evil denizens of its sandbox. The game's 14 stages of highly destructible environments play to the strengths of the heroine's

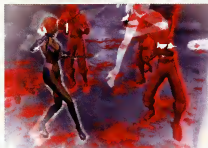
special harpoon weapon. In the first game, the vampiress could hook enemies and yank them to her. Now, she can use the harpoon to snag arches and other collapsible architecture, putting them down on unsuspecting bad guys. Enemies can also now be speared and tossed like trout.

The basic run, gun, and slice mentality remains intact, with developer Terminal Reality working to improve the game's aesthetics while also deepening its fighting. Graphical

Rattlebrain
"We Make You Think..."



Verifiable retail value of the prize packages as follows: Media Rig Contest package \$7,012.00 core components shown, bonus options \$3,449.00, cash options \$1,250.00. Computer Contest package \$2,500.00 for computer, bonus options \$2,337.00, cash options \$1,250.00. Video Game Contest \$700.00 for systems shown, \$3,549.00 bonus options, \$1,250.00 cash options.



→ As you can see from the screen at right, *Bloodrayne 2* is more chunky than ever, with gentlemen being hewn in two by Rayne's keen blades. Men by the dozen line up for a body piercing in the way that can only be delivered by Majesco's Nazi-hunting vampiress. Ah, the good life.



finery in the form of light bloom (an illumination technique that softens the outer edges of objects, thus creating a backglow effect) and improved polygon counts to accentuate characters and environments have been heaped upon the sequel. In the heat of combat, Rayne will be able to perform an estimated 35 to 40 new kicks, leaps, slices, and stabs. A new lock-on system provides additional depth to the brawling. Rayne's attacks are more scattered—they hit

more enemies but do less damage when not focused on one person; however, once she's chosen her victim and locked on, her attacks are much more deadly.

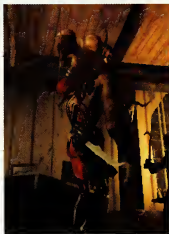
Grinding rails worked for Tony Hawk, and it'll probably work for Rayne, too. As the heroine slides and glides, players will be able to chain together a series of flips, jumps, and midair decapitations. The developers are so keen on this new rail sliding—which, apparently, is the new Nazi eviscerating—

they've made it a major section of the game; Rayne will have to traverse a huge series of rails on the way to an enemy-held factory.

The blood lust will be satiated in October, with Rayne's 15 minutes of fame possibly peaking about the time her movie—the one helmed by bad-movie director Uwe Boll—sees release in 2005. **B**

GMA SAYS → Rayne looks better, than ever, and we mean that in the nicest way.

→ **HOW HOT...**



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RELEASE | MAY

BURNOUT 3

OUR DAILY COMMUTE

SYSTEM PS2/XB PUBLISHER EA DEVELOPER CRITERION



← Saddy, this is not too different from the usual. San Francisco cab rides *BURN* editors get after late nights at the office. If we have to go to the ER, we only tip \$1.



➔ Buckle the funk up, boys and girls, we're about to innovate. Close your eyes for a second and imagine, if you will, a videogame that features cars. These cars are controlled by the players, and the object of the game is to drive these cars really fast. Now stay with us: There'll be opportunities to drive even faster than normally possible, and...are you ready for this...crash the cars into stuff. It's an ambitious idea, we admit, but it's crazy enough that it just might work.

This is what the *Burnout* series is

all about: racing unlicensed vehicles (but we know what they really are) through famous cityscapes at ridiculous velocities, balancing the need to be first across the finish line with satisfying the curiosity that lies in all of us but can't be lawfully quenched in real life—what would really happen if I were to intentionally ram this city bus head-on at 80 mph?

As you might have heard by now (if you're so inclined to pay attention to these sorts of things), Electronic Arts has picked up the *Burnout* franchise,

which was formerly owned by Acclaim. The good news is that the same development studio, namely Criterion Games, is still responsible for the actual game. Tentatively scheduled for a September release on Xbox and PlayStation 2 (the latter version featuring online play), *Burnout 3* already appears to be shaping up nicely. The most significant change is the new emphasis on offensive driving: incidental contact is much more forgiving, and players are rewarded for taking out competitors—our early

favorite move is scraping off lesser motorists on the elevated-train-track support struts. But if you find yourself on the receiving end of a vehicular incident, the resulting carnage of bending steel, airborne wheels, and *Independence Day*-caliber displays of showering sparks is most impressive. And your insurance company won't be calling you in the morning. ☹

GA SAYS → Overboard in the office: *Burnout 3*? It's hot. Appropriately, no?

➔ HOW HOT...



XB

PS2

RELEASE | FALL

RESIDENT EVIL 4

WHEN ZOMBIES AREN'T HUMAN...OR ZOMBIES

SYSTEM: GC DEVELOPER: CAPCOM CREDITS: CAPCOM



➔ When *Resident Evil* started to take off in the first few years following its release, many made a connection between it and *House of the Dead*. The games played differently, but both had you in a house shooting zombies. So it's only fitting that the latest *Resident Evil* takes a few steps toward being more like a lightgun game.

The biggest change is a new camera. For the first time in the series, the camera shows things from your character's perspective. You can

select a third-person view, a closer over-the-shoulder view, or a first-person view, all of which show the approaching creatures staring at you, like they do in a gun game.

These angles also go a long way to alleviate some of the complaints people had with the controls in previous *RE* games. Before, you would enter a room from a bird's-eye camera angle and press up to move in the direction your character faced. Now, the control scheme is mostly the same, but since the

camera is always from your viewpoint, it feels more intuitive to move where you want.

Your enemies also have an easier time getting around this time out, since for the first time they are not zombies. The developers are keeping mum on the exact backgrounds of the characters—we know they're not humans either, although that's about it—but we do know that because they are no longer zombies, they are smarter and move faster. In one scene, we made our way to a

lookout point at the top of a tower and the enemies down on the ground started tossing firebombs at us, so it should be difficult to hide.

To counter this, you have a beefed-up set of weapons—grenades, a machine gun, and a sniper rifle join an upgraded pistol with a laser sight. You can even use the pinpoint accuracy of the pistol to shoot at specific body parts. If you shoot an enemy's leg a couple times, he will fall over. Your improved aim also lets you shoot



6-Sure, he might look like your grandpa Stanislaw from Warsaw, but your grandpa would he? Probably not, which is why we can't envision emptying our gun in his face the way pretty boy Leon Kennedy's doing here. When we see our grannypaps, we save ammo!



THE A BUTTON

➔ One of the big changes to the game's controls is that the A button triggers context-sensitive actions. If you walk up to a window, you can jump through it or choose to push a dresser up in front of it; if you are near a fence, you can jump over it. The button also provides a melee attack of sorts; if you stun an enemy by shooting him in the head, you are then able to kick him. It's like a dumbed-down version of the Quick Time Events in *Shenmue*—you get all the fancy animation without the directional-button-pressing work. 1E



weapons (including axes, pitchforks, and chain saws) out of your enemies' hands or out of midair when they are thrown at you—another similarity to *House of the Dead*.

Other gameplay changes include the opportunity to use vehicles (including boats), traps in the woods that you can help dogs out of land get stuck in yourself, a context-sensitive A button (see sidebar) that enables new maneuvers, and the ability to

shoot through certain parts of doors realistically. Your inventory has items such as Red Spray (which extends your life bar slightly) and Mr. Mikami's wristwatch (a reference to game director Shinji Mikami).

Topping off the list of new features is the game's setting. The story places you in an Eastern European town where an unknown organization has kidnapped the president's daughter. Leon, now a U.S. secret agent, heads there to

investigate when he finds out not all is well with the town's civilians.

Certain *Resident Evil* conventions are still around—you have the walk-or-run-but-nothing-in-between digital movement controls—but there's a ton of new features here, and it looks freakin' fantastic, so we're expecting big things. 1E

GIMA SAYS ➔ There's so much new that it almost feels like a different series.

➔ HOW HOT... ●●●●●

GALLERY

KILLER 7

ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?

Later this fall, or maybe even winter (Capcom isn't sayin'), the hunt is on as the Smith family takes on underground overlord Kun Lan in an action-filled first-person shooter that looks unlike anything we've ever seen. The twist here is that the seven members of the Smith family all reside in the mind of the game's wheelchair-ridden protagonist, Harman Smith. Crazy? Sure, but hey, we're down with crazy.

→ With seven crazy personalities at his disposal, Harman Smith will offer a good variety of gameplay styles. The interesting part is that these are not just in his "mind." He can physically transform on the fly.

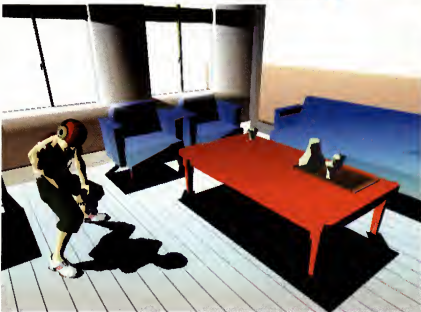


→ Different characters have different powers. Dan Smith, for example, can control time and slow it down, making shooting enemies easier. Another personality, The Mask, uses fire to decimate the enemy and solve puzzles.

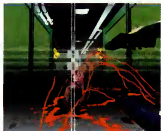




→ Resident Evil has zombies. Well, Killer 7 has the mummified undead! That's slightly different, isn't it? The game also has style to spare, and we're hoping the conservative masses don't overlook this bold experiment in game presentation when the game ships this fall/winter.



→ A lot of the action in Killer 7 takes place in a psychedelic first-person mode that has to be seen in action to be appreciated. It's part art film, part *Rez*, part *Psychonauta*. Buckle down! OK, we're done.



NOW



HOW WE RATE

1 AWFULNESS 2 CRASHOLY 3 PITIFUL 4 OOPS 5 AVERAGE 6 GOOD STUFF 7 RECOMMENDED 8 EXCELLENT 9 TOTALLY SICK 10 TIMELESS CLASSIC

For the second consecutive month, we're leading off the reviews section with a stealth-based game. That's all fine and dandy for our readers with a stalker complex (about 36 percent of you) who like to sit in the shadows and watch, but what about those who want to run-and-gun and slice-and-dice? *Battlefield Vietnam*, *Breakdown*, *Ninja Gaiden*...we got you.

WARNING! WHERE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF A GAME ARE AVAILABLE, OFFICIAL MONITOR DIFFERENCES ONLY IF THEY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GAMEPLAY.

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GMA SCORING SYSTEM

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WARIOWARE INC.: MEGA PARTY GAMES	GC	087





← Better work that, while your teammate is incapacitating his merc counterpart, your better half just spotted you with his torchlight. Maybe if you hadn't tripped that motion detector they planted near the door, you guys wouldn't be in this jam. OK, fine. Don't listen to us. Say the way you want to say: Good luck.



XB

SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

DAMN IT, FISHER

MATURE | XB

PUBLISHER: UBI
DEVELOPER: UBI
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE DATE: 1-4-06
PLAYERS: 1-4
OS: PC, PS2, PS3, XBOX, XBOX360, WII, ZONE

➔ We should all consider ourselves fortunate that life has yet—that we know of—to imitate Ubisoft's art. Three times a year, we'd be mere seconds away from a devastating VX or smallpox attack on the population, our only salvation being a gruff-yet-endearing operative (or team thereof), a handful of flashbang grenades, and bad guys who can't comprehend why they'd ever need to be able to see in the dark.

Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* carries on this fine tradition of anonymously saving the world (or at least a small portion of the United States), offering an exhausting and often frustrating single-player game that's buoyed by

one of the freshest multiplayer experiences in years.

It should be known by now that stealth games, or any games that feature (often unnecessarily) at least one stealth level, are not for the impatient or easily aggravated. This is especially true for stealth games in which the mission (i.e., the game) is over when you're spotted by the enemy. And it's doubly especially true in *Pandora Tomorrow*, in which the mission is over when you're detected by enemies, concerned passersby, a flock of birds, guards who can see your left arm slightly twitching in complete darkness, and nonexistent security cameras that spot bodies you

left in the shadows...where you were told you should leave them.

This is *Pandora's* downfall: For a game that requires stealth and discreet action, the mechanics aren't very forgiving—or for that matter, consistent. For instance, shooting out the lights in a room will elicit one of three possible responses: 1) absolutely nothing at all, 2) enemies will notice and begin a halfhearted search for the cause, or 3) an alarm is sounded, guards open fire, and the mission is over (or will be shortly). The response you get is seemingly chosen at random, which creates hesitation in the player, and as the cautionary saying goes, you hesitate, and you're dead. Granted, this is dynamic. But it's also highly frustrating.

RIPPED FROM THE HEADLINES



As with most games based on covert operations, geopolitics plays a central role in the plot. *Pandora Tomorrow's* script is, for all intents and purposes, sufficiently topical. The man with the plan—Fisher's primary target—parrots the same empty-calorie diatribes found in Parisian editorials and, as they say, "the Arab street": America is big, evil, and must be stopped. Only this guy has the magic ingredients for a revolution: funding, charisma, insanity, and a whole lotta smallpox. Sadly, there isn't enough time to dig into the deeper social questions such as "why?" when there are more pressing questions to attend to, like "who do I shoot, and how many times?" Yet another opportunity to weave an intelligent, timely, and thought-provoking story falls victim to the limitations of the medium. **B+**



← Just like the first *Splinter Cell*, light and shadows are integral to the game mechanics. In this excellent train level, Sam clings to the side, but can't move until it clears the light posts along the tracks, lest a daydreaming passenger raises an eyebrow. And alarm.



Other mechanical mysteries include alarmingly inaccurate marksmanship (it shouldn't take four attempts to bust a fluorescent light), guards with Kevlar-lined brain tissue (likewise, it shouldn't take four bullets in the head to end someone), and enemies with a peculiar tendency to alter their patrol route so that it leads directly into a crouching and motionless Fisher—still shrouded in darkness, mind you—and then walk around in small circles while you try to grab them from behind. At that point, the urge to whip out a sawed-off shotgun and say "to hell with the world!" is overwhelming.

The good news is that the single-player game, if you have the patience, is

still worth experiencing—even with the lousy plot payoff at the end. The even better news, though, is that you don't even need to bother with the single-player game if you have Xbox Live. *Pandora Tomorrow's* multiplayer mode is the real reason to play and the reason for the high score attached to this review. The refreshing simplicity of "two spies versus two mercenaries" contrasts with massively multiplayer games like *Battlefield*: It's the same strategic fun but on a much smaller scale. Coherent communication amongst teammates is of extreme importance, as is knowing the abilities, weaknesses, and strengths of both the spy and the merc, as is intimate knowledge of every aspect of the

environment: objective locations, entrances, exits, escape routes, hiding spots, cover points, lights, shadows, and sounds. It's intimidating at first and takes an investment in time to learn, but the dividends are bountiful.

Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow, for the lone gamer, is good. At times, it is very good. But played with friends online, it is exceptional. **A-**

—Andrew Pfister

GMR 9/10

BETTER THAN RAINBOW SIX 3 (MULTI)
NOT AS GOOD AS RAINBOW SIX 3 (SINGLE)
(ON PAR WITH RAINBOW SIX 3 (WHOLE))

2ND OPINION

Considering the risk my own body was exposed to while dodging the F1's airborne contrailers, I'd contest the score he gave it. Based on the highly frustrating AI and undergirding play mechanics this sequel exhibits, *PT* feels like it should have been given a few more months in the oven. **B+**
—James Mielke

X8

PS2

PS3

GC

THAT WAS
THEN

see what's
NEXT



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THE SUFFERING GIVE 'EM THE CHAIR

MATURE | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2

➔ What do *Resident Evil*, *The Hulk*, and HBO's *Oz* have in common? Well, nothing really. But *Midway's* new survival-horror game *The Suffering* might best be summed up as a freakish amalgamation of the three.

The Suffering puts you in the shoes of a convicted murderer named Torque. Certainly not the most glamorous videogame hero for the most articulate—he never speaks during the game), Torque is an inmate at the Abbott State Penitentiary, a vaguely Alcatraz-ish prison off the coast of Maryland. Abbott has a bit of a sinister reputation when it comes to unexplained deaths and other disturbing phenomena, and things start going more than a little wrong as Torque awaits his death sentence.

Exploring the haunted penitentiary (in either first- or third-person mode) turns up scores of mutilated bodies, fellow inmates who have been driven to various degrees of insanity, recurring hallucinations, and a host of indescribable undead creatures. No one seems to have much of an explanation for what's going on, but

that's OK—tons of weapons, ranging from homemade shanks to high-velocity firearms, are lying about to ensure your safety.

You'll also routinely have the ammo and medicine to outlive anything. That is, when the A.I. isn't forcing you to waste every last round on the occasional endless river of zombies (that's when you trigger Torque's Hulk-like "insanity" transformation—a tactic you'll hardly ever use). The game's frequent puzzles also range from simplistic to mildly frustrating. Fortunately, you'll be finished with the game in a weekend.

Difficulty imbalances aside, *The Suffering* tries hard to convey a gritty atmosphere. In addition to the gruesome violence and Torque's random freak-outs, the game contains lots of well-written (but sometimes highly repetitive) dialogue and a profusion of graphic language. This one's a no-brainer for the kids, but it might be for anyone else who enjoys the survival-horror genre. Just be ready for a bumpy ride. **A-**

—Ryan Scott



FOR MIDWAY
BOX: SERIAL SOFTWARE
PC: AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1
CROSS: N/A

GMR S¹⁰

BETTER THAN CURSE: THE EYE OF ISIS
NOT AS GOOD AS: ETERNAL DARKNESS
WAIT FOR IT: SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING HIT THE SNOOZE

MATURE | XB

➔ The only thing unreal that awakened while playing this game was the uncontrollable urge to vomit. In fact, *Unreal II: The Awakening* is a great example of a piss-poor, watered-down port of a good PC game. Want to experience the pain? Then by all means, read on.

The things that stood out in the PC original were the sharp graphics and sweet weapons. While the guns remain, nobody woke up the programmers long enough to work the graphics into this version. You'll bear witness to flat, dull textures that barely look passable by today's Xbox standards. More painful, though, is the onscreen blur factor: Changing gear resulted in ghostly afterimages that lingered onscreen for a few seconds—an effect experienced on different television sets. Besides conjuring images of an acid trip gone horribly awry, this made it traumatic to navigate through some of the dark, dank levels. We aren't living in a fantasy world, and we know that the Xbox simply can't stack up to the

graphics horsepower of a top-end PC, but damn!

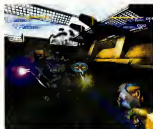
Not all the changes are bad, though: This port turns your interactions with the crew into a series of never-ending strings of cut-scenes. At least you can skip them and cut to the blurry chase. The one saving grace here (and the term "grace" is used loosely) is the inclusion of the XMP multiplayer mode. A recent free addition for owners of the PC game, this serves to push a good number of people online in 12-player *Battlefield*-like matches, but it falls way short of being "unreal." **B-**

—Darren Gladstone

FOR AMI
BOX: TACTICAL INTERACTIVE
PC: AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-12
CROSS: N/A

GMR 4¹⁰

FOR MORE BLUR, DRINK SOME VODKA
NOT AS GOOD AS: TEP HALO
WAIT FOR IT: DOOM 3





← Fight Night 2004 features over 20 licensed fighters, as well as one of the most impressive create-a-player modes we've ever had the pleasure of fiddling with. It should also be noted that the PS2 game features head-to-head online play, while the Xbox version does not.



FIGHT NIGHT 2004

PUNCH DRUNK LOVE

TEEN | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2

➔ *Fight Night 2004* is a brutally lifelike affair that firmly shores home the fact that 21st-century videogaming is rapidly approaching an era of photo-realism. The detail in the fighter models and their movements is frighteningly convincing, and performing a violent action against another human being feels appreciably authentic. Apply this technical sophistication to games such as *Manhunt* or *Counter-Strike*, and then invite Senator Joe Lieberman, Pat Buchanan, and your mom over for a quick round of "shoot the fish in the barrel." Things are about to get grimy, folks.

Despite this fact—or perhaps because of it—*Fight Night* is quite

undeniably a superb boxing title. EA has implemented an equivalent to *NBA Live 2004*'s Freestyle control here, meaning that virtually the entire game is played with two analog sticks and two triggers; the left stick controls movement and dodging, while the right stick controls punching and blocking. Imagine the right stick as a pair of arms: Vertical motions throw jabs, while an assortment of circular motions produce hooks and uppercuts. It's a bold decision (to say the least) that, at least initially, serves to slow the pace of the game relative to button-mashers past. Give it some time, however, and it becomes clear that this is the first game to accurately reproduce the ebb and flow of a boxing match.

(Fear not, ye mashers: more traditional button controls are available as well.)

All of the expected trimmings are here: an extensive career mode, a wide range of real boxers, and EA's now standard Def Jam presentation. The gameplay is deep and rewarding, and somehow every match, long or short, feels like it was lifted directly out of *Rocky IV*. Well done. **B+**

—Evan Shamoon

2ND OPINION

I couldn't agree more—*Fight Night 2004* is an absolute must-buy for sports fans. You're treated to innovative controls, a massive career mode, brainy fighter A.I., and beautiful visuals to boot. Heck, if you're a PS2 owner, the log-free online play seals the deal. **B+**
—Brian Iltner, EGM

FORMER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1-2
GENRE: FEA

GMR 9/10
SWIFT SERVICE
WAY BETTER THAN KNOCKOUT KINGS 2003
SLIGHTLY LESS BETTER THAN VICTORIOUS BOXERS
WANT FOR IT A REMAKE OF THE ORIGINAL NES WHILE
TYSON'S PUNCH OUT!

SAMURAI JACK: THE SHADOW OF AKU

THE SAMU-RIGHT GAME FOR JACK FANS

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

➔ It's a little difficult to think of *Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku* as a bona fide game. It's more like a part of the *Samurai Jack* marketing campaign [commercial? Check! T-shirts and mugs? Check! Videogame? Check!].

This doesn't make it bad, it just places it in proper context. *Samurai Jack* is in fact an average platformer that comes with the right elements for making it a *really fun* average platformer. The thankfully tight control set means you won't keep missing jumps. The logical puzzles equal a low frustration factor. The abundance of save points is bloody generous. Cool combos, a useful slowdown (Sakai) mode, and plenty of power-ups deliver a rewarding gaming experience.

This is especially true for fans of the Cartoon Network show. The game hits the mark in terms of *Samurai Jack* authenticity. As he battles his arch nemesis Aku, Jack acts and

sounds like you'd expect Jack to act and sound. Only cel shading, rather than 3D RenderWare-ing, would have taken this over the top.

As far as action-platformers go, *Samurai Jack* isn't about to replace the likes of *Jack*, *Ratchet & Clank*, or *Prince of Persia*. It lacks depth, and it's way too easy (a weekend ought to do it). But for a nice diversion and a little extra Sam Jack time, put on your *Samurai Jack* pajamas, pour a cup of tea in your *Samurai Jack* mug, and treat yourself to some quality samurai time. **B+**

—Tom Byron

TEEN	SEA	PRICE	\$29.99
DEV	IMMIGRANT	PLAYERS	1
RET.	AVAILABLE NOW	REGION	USA

GMR 6¹⁰

BETTER THAN THE HOBBIT
NOT AS GOOD AS JACK & RATCHET & CLANK 3, ETC
WAIT FOR IT: JACK & RATCHET & CLANK 3, ETC

ADDED UP



NAVAL OPS: COMMANDER

DRIFTIN' AWAY

TEEN | PS2

➔ Russell Crowe, as plucky sea captain Jack Aubrey in *Master and Commander*, taught us all to love the sea once again. Koei's *Naval Ops: Commander* reminds us all that humankind dumps a lot of its trash into the briny blue.

Like its predecessor, *Naval Ops: Warship Gunner*, the game balances deep ship-building and modification strategy with real-time, action-heavy combat. During the commingling, unfortunately, *Commander* finds its heart while losing much of its soul.

Commander's new top-down view lets players see more of the battlefield and better manage their support ships, but it serves to yank them from the action. *Warship Gunner* offered a visceral experience with its perspective focusing on a ship's forward hull; its sequel hints at God

playing with a tiny pipe-cleaner armada. The addition of support ships enhances the action sequences, but these craft function only as part of a fleet, and lackluster A.I. often has them banging halfheartedly against coastlines instead of assaulting ground positions.

While the action portion of *Commander* is a leaky dinghy, the strategy elements are the Titanic, pre-iceberg. Once docked at a base, players can tinker with their fleet, swapping out parts and aircraft; improve their weapons, electronics, and metallurgical capabilities; buy prebuilt carriers, destroyers, cruisers, etc.; and have their ships analyzed for weaknesses. It's this depth that buoys *Commander*, ultimately saving it from being one great video SOS call. **B+**

—Greg Orlando

TEEN	SEA	PRICE	\$29.99
DEV	IMMIGRANT	PLAYERS	1
RET.	AVAILABLE NOW	REGION	JAPAN

GMR 5¹⁰

BETTER THAN BLOOD WISE
NOT AS GOOD AS NAVAL OPS: WARSHIP GUNNER
WAIT FOR IT: P.T.O. V

FINAL FANTASY XI

THE TOTAL OBLITERATION OF PRODUCTIVITY, ONE LEVEL AT A TIME

TEEN | PS2 (REVIEWED) | PC

➔ If the amount of time we've put into *Final Fantasy XI* is any indication, we here at GMR had better check ourselves into MMORPG rehab, and quick. Since the release of the PC version, we've clocked in approximately 26 days of playtime, and the meter's still ticking. That's not 26 days on which we touched *FFXI*, it's 26 days times 24 hours equals 624 hours and counting. Such is the appeal of a game that dwarfs even the 50-100 hour length of some of the largest traditional RPGs like *Chrono Cross* or *Dragon Warrior VII*. But what keeps us playing?

Evidence would suggest that it's the deliberate, carefully paced character progression that makes gamers feel as if they've really earned every level. The first 20 levels are the school of hard knocks, with players falling into the same handful of job descriptions and mostly soloing while they learn the ropes. It can be frustrating at times, but it's not until around levels 18 and 20 that the true appeal of the game even makes itself known. As you grow more powerful, as you earn a support job, as you acquire the freedom to rent chocobos (which makes travel about 1,000 times easier than running around—slowly—on foot), you get to visit far-off lands, fight the most spectacular battles, and meet hundreds of new players. The feeling is quite like making the leap from high-school life to college and all the excitement that entails. When you reach level 30 and can adopt an advanced job—like dragon, samurai, and ninja—it's like graduating from college and moving to the big city.

While the endless customizations, race-specific equipment, and artifact gear are enough to make each player want to maximize his own particular avatar (along with the new relic gear and added extras, refinements, and areas added in recent patch updates), it's really the social element that makes you want to keep playing. Besides the fact that no one would want to watch his investment in this game evaporate into the Ethernet (your character is stored on Squenix's servers), no one would really want to turn his back on the friends, allies, and rivals met in Vana'diel. No matter



what time you log on and play, chances are that at least some of your cohorts will be there. Ironically, this brings to mind the connectivity issue that Nintendo's been pushing on us the past couple of years. As much as we hate to break the news to you, Mr. Miyamoto, this is where the revolution is happening. ☛

—James Mielke



2ND OPINION

FFXI's appeal can't be denied, since certain people can't be pulled away from it. But I don't understand the attraction of wandering around and looking for pointy-eared friends so you can kill a bunny or something, and because it keeps Milky up at night playing, which makes him late to work. I'm against it. ☛
—Carrie Shepherd

← You could play *FFXI* for months (we know, we've done it) and not even scratch 30 percent of what it has to offer. Sure there's a monthly fee, but you get what you pay for in spades.

PC

PS2

PLAY SIZE 100% SQUARE ENIX
DEV. SQUARE ENIX
REL. AVAILABLE NOW

PLAYS 25/31 (JPN/INT)
PLAYERS INFINITY AND BEYOND
REGION JAPAN

GMR SOUL DESTROYED 9¹⁰

MORE ADDICTIVE THAN PHANTASY STAR ONLINE
MOST THREATENED BY EVERQUEST II
WAIT FOR IT: TRUE FANTASY LIVE ONLINE

HEY BATTER BATTER!

IT'S A WHOLE NEW BALL GAME! WELL, SORT OF. YO, BEER MAN!

It's the May issue, which means you're reading this in April, which means that the boys of summer are still the toddlers of spring. But more importantly, it means that it's once again time to review this year's crop of baseball games. First-person viewpoints, fielder cams, mandatory steroid testing...just kidding. That's next year.

MLB 2005 SLEEPER FAVORITE

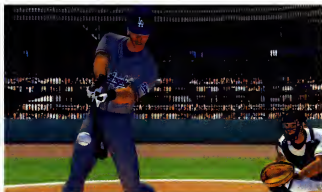
EVERYONE | PS2

➔ At its core, *MLB 2005* is the same ol' "choose your pitch and throw it" and "time your swing and hit it" brand of 3D baseball you've seen everywhere for years now. But that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Although it lacks the graphical detail of competing games, *MLB* actually does offer a solid baseball simulation—complete with top-tier animation—that any fan of the sport should enjoy. Sure, there's the occasional A.I. glitch [throwing to second when it's the only base that runners aren't headed toward?]. Little things—such as the inability to check swings, balls in the dirt looking like low strikes until they actually hit the ground—also plague the game. But overall, everything feels responsive, scores and stats come out realistically, and the atmosphere just feels right.

And wouldn't you know it? *MLB* does include several features that 989's competitors would do well to emulate—just nothing you'd notice by playing a single game. Most interestingly, although it takes a lot of trial and error, you can use the EyeToy peripheral to map your face onto a career player. Then you can put him in career mode, in which you lead a single major league hopeful through spring training in an attempt at getting him a slot on the opening-day roster. Finally, the franchise mode allows you to make management decisions such as what happens on the field, how the team's money is spent, and when to have a bobblehead day.

If 989 can spiff up the graphics a bit and work out the bugs, it might have something to contend with in 2005. **B+**
—Chris Baker



PLAY ACCLAIM	PRICE	\$29.99
DEV. ACCLAIM	PLAYERS	1-2
EV. AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE	S.P.A.

GMR SHEFFIELD 7/10

BETTER THAN CORNED BATS
NOT AS GOOD AS THE NEW BASEBALL 2004
ON PAR WITH SECRET STADIUM SAUCE



ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2005 WILD CARD

EVERYONE | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2

➔ Acclaim's latest portrayal of America's favorite pastime serves as a perfect example of what happens when a bunch of little annoying quirkies team up to form Vottron—or at least a bigger problem that affects the overall quality of the game.

Let's start with the fielding, which introduces a new feature called the fielder cam. This new option puts you in an on-the-field perspective, making it feel as though you're the shortstop diving after a line drive or an outfielder waiting for a pop-up. Unfortunately, this perspective makes it not only very difficult to react quickly, but also just downright disorienting—even after playing through several games. But even without the fielder cam, defensive controls are just a tad too sluggish—it's not uncommon to see a player circling

around a ball on the ground or to have an outfielder take his sweet time throwing the ball into the infield because of the imprecision. There's a similar issue with the batting, where the timing seems to be a little off, but it's something you can adjust to after playing multiple times.

Despite all this, there are plenty of cool extra modes to keep any sort of baseball fan busy. Reliving some of baseball's greatest moments is very cool, as is creating your own franchise and taking it to the World Series. Of course, there's also online play, so *All-Star Baseball* offers no shortage of things to do, and the gameplay (even with its problems) is good enough that you won't completely hate taking advantage of them. **B+**

—Giancarlo Varranini



PLAY ACCLAIM	PRICE	\$29.99
DEV. ACCLAIM	PLAYERS	1-2
EV. AVAILABLE NOW	GENRE	S.P.A.

GMR JETER 7/10

BETTER THAN THE USUAL ACCLAIM STUFF
NOT AS GOOD AS THE SAUSAGE RACE
WAIT FOR IT: CUBS VS. RED SOX WORLD SERIES



MVP BASEBALL 2004

MR. OCTOBER

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | XB | GC

➔ You won't find a better baseball game this year than **MVP Baseball 2004**. The game takes the solid foundation established by the franchise's 2003 debut and propels it toward perfection.

Once again, MVP's most valuable feature is its unique pitching meter, which makes EA's game the only one in which you might rather pitch than hit. You really feel like it's your fault—not some unfortunate bit of A.I. taking over—if you plant a tasty meatball right in Albert Pujols' wheelhouse.

MVP also has the distinctive edge in terms of presentation. It looks amazing, and making it look all the more realistic are subtle additions such as appeals to first after a check swing, replays at the end of an inning set to "cut to commercial" type music, dropped third strikes, and fantastic crowd noise.

EA has ambitiously included every single AA and AAA farm club as well. So now, the truly hardcore can play complete minor league schedules day by day along with their favorite big-league team. What better way to judge

who's ready for the show? Only thing is, you're already obliged to play (or at least sim through) all 162 games each year—no condensed seasons here.

MVP 2004 institutes the right analog stick as the way to slide, dive, and jump. It still needs work, though, and it seems to do more harm than good. And please, EA, fix the baserunning! You will find yourself losing games—and somewhat often—due to the confusing system in place.

Those gripes aside, it's hard to complain about MVP. It's not quite the Madden of baseball games yet...but it's very close. **16**

—Chris Baker

FOR ELECTRONIC ARTS	PRICE: \$49.99
NEW ELECTRONIC ARTS	PLAYERS: 1-2
RELEASABLE NOW	GENRE: B.S.A.

GMR 9th

BETTER THAN: SELIG'S COMB OVER
NOT AS GOOD AS: \$25 MILLION A YEAR
WORTH FOR IT: MLB SLUGFEST LOADED



XB

PS2

GC



FOR EA	PRICE: \$49.99
NEW VISION CONCEPTS	PLAYERS: 1-2
RELEASABLE NOW	GENRE: B.S.A.

GMR 7th

BETTER THAN: BSEB PRICES AT MILLER PARK
NOT AS GOOD AS: MVP BASEBALL 2004
WORTH FOR IT: MLB SLUGFEST LOADED

ESPN MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL IN THE HUNT

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | XB

➔ Sega's first baseball game under the ESPN moniker plays well enough to recommend to anyone looking for a solid simulation of America's pastime [well...if MVP Baseball 2004 is sold out, anyway]. But it also demonstrates—as well as any title you may have ever played in any genre—how one single, seemingly subtle element can really affect a game's tone. In ESPN's case? Crowd noise.

Imagine this: Randy Johnson strides down Andruw Jones in a pivotal win-or-lose moment. But there's no excitement to be heard from the sold-out crowd. Aside from a single heckler who insists that Andruw learn how to spell his name, you only ever hear a light roar—even when the ball is hit. As a result, you simply don't feel all that enthralled. If fact, moments of lesser magnitude sometimes cause downright boredom. [Don't even think about

saying "how realistic," you baseball-hating communists out there.]

Luckily, ESPN has enough going for it to make up for any occasional yawns. For one, it handles baserunning and fielding better than any competitor. The franchise mode is deep enough, and hitting and pitching function as well as you'd expect. And save for the occasional weird glitch (most notably, when an infielder acts as though he's about to catch a line drive that actually zooms right over him), ESPN comes mostly bug free.

But really, what's with the Confidence meter? How can Roger Clemens' meter be at rock bottom when he's winning 11-1? And the first-person baseball feature? Don't even think about it.

Do think about giving ESPN a whirl, though. You'll like it...if it doesn't put you to sleep first. **14**

—Chris Baker



→ We hope your thumbs are ready for the vigorous exercising they will get when you fire up *Ninja Gaiden*. This game isn't for the weak or weary, as it will literally kick the crap out of you. These handy enough to take it on the chin and get up for another round, however, will discover, level by level, the greatest action game of its generation.



NINJA GAIDEN

THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD

MATURE | XB

➔ As some of you might know, a couple months back, we reviewed *Ninja Gaiden*, only to groan as Tecmo pushed the release date back so that Team Ninja could more leisurely sew things up for its eventual release. Now that the game is out, let's take another look, shall we?

First, the game is now slightly more considerate to the end user. Enemy attacks are more forgiving, allowing Ryu to escape their attacks while offering counterattacks of his own. Enemies who would have previously interrupted Ryu's attacks and combos are now less likely to do so, provided his actions have already been initiated. Boss battles, like fighting the large electric eel, give

players more space to run around on, allowing for greater evasive potential.

Previously, the game allowed players to kill respawning enemies ad infinitum, enabling them to collect those souls and purchase an endless supply of healing elixirs, skewing the game's balance. Now, the game puts a cap on how many elixirs you can carry, making for a greater but more sensible challenge.

Other minor tweaks have taken place, but none so great that you'd think this were a different game than the one we played back in December. The puzzles are still somewhat contrived, but besides that, this is sheer adrenaline on a disc. With a wide assortment of weapons to find and upgrade, Ryu's

combat system is as deep as something like *Soul Calibur II*'s, while adding beautiful, enormous environments that put *Prince of Persia* to shame. When you consider that the development team has only a few fighting games and a volleyball game to its name, this is an even bigger surprise. This is the rare instance in which the end result delivers on the hype. **LE**

—James Mielke

GMR 9¹⁰

BETTER THAN: DEVIL MAY CRY
NOT AS GOOD AS: ARE YOU SERIOUS?
WAIT FOR IT: DEATH BY DEGREES

2ND OPINION

As of writing this I have yet to finish the first level. Having my ass handed to me by regular, run-of-the-mill brown-clad ninjas was unexpected and to be honest, a little humbling. But I cannot, may, will not live with this shame inflicted upon my family name...back into the fray! **LE**
—Andrew Pilster

PRODUCED BY
TECNO TEAM NINJA
DEVELOPER
TECNO
PUBLISHED BY
TECNO
AVAILABLE NOW
TECNO
TECNO
TECNO



SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX

20-ECCHS-ECCHS

TEEN | PS2

→ When you start planning a project, you generally pick out a developer first. You get a talented team to make the game, and then you spend what's left on big-name licenses, expensive theme songs, and hip French comic book artists. All that isn't going to mean much if the game it's attached to isn't any good, right?

With *Seven Samurai 20XX*, Sammy got it completely backward. It spent its money on a pricey film license, Ryuichi Sakamoto music, characters by the famous Gallic artists Jean Giraud (aka Moebius), and then, with the change it had left in the piggy bank, it hired Dimps. This game is so bad that it's insulting to both the talent behind it and the poor bastards who'll end up playing it.

The infuriating part is, a few people with talent did have the misfortune to work on this game. Dimps has a couple of decent artists and animators, and Moebius gave them a nice, flashy

cast of characters to work with. So, it's twice as appalling to discover the kind of pathetically shallow design they've been trapped in. This is what you'd get if *Dynasty Warriors* had absolutely nothing to it—no broad cast of characters, no progression for their abilities, no depth for its enemies, no strategy in its boss battles, no story worth mentioning, and a voice cast with almost, if not quite, no talent.

So, is there anything here worth playing? Nope. Nothing at all. **D** *—Dave Smith*

FILE SHOWN: SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX	PRICE: \$29.99
FILE SHOWN: SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX	PLAYERS: 1
FILE SHOWN: SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX	GENRE: ACTION

GMR 2¹⁰

BETTER THAN: BEING STOMPED BY HELLS ANGELS
NOT AS GOOD AS: ALMOST ANYTHING ELSE
ALSO TRY: SAMURAI WARRIORS

WARIOWARE INC.: MEGA PARTY GAMES\$

TEST THOSE MAD SKILLZ, KIDZ

EVERYONE | GC

→ *WarioWare Inc.: Mega Party Game\$* is like the SAT of videogames, a rapid-fire test of standard videogame skills. From the ability to process onscreen information on the fly to punching the A button like mad, you're drilled on speed, timing, control, stamina, and even intelligence in a couple hundred 5-second games.

Unlike the SATs, though, things never get tedious, due to reams of wackiness and humor. One second, you'll be trying to stretch a shirt over Wario's rotund belly without ripping it, and the next, you've got to scurry a group of people out of range of a descending drinking glass. Part of the challenge is figuring out what the heck you're supposed to do before the time is up.

Many Nintendo fans are already familiar with these games from their GBA incarnation, which Nintendo shipped last spring. This GameCube iteration has been repackaged with the single-player games intact and some new ways to face off against friends.

Some are great, including one that incorporates *Othello*-like gameplay and another that forces you to balance on a stack of turtles that gets bigger as you lose minigames. Some are just weird, particularly one that requires you to do things like bark like a dog as you play while your opponents rate you. There are also cooperative games and Mario Party-esque luck-based wins. Even if you already own the GBA version, there's probably enough multiplayer goodness to entice you to pick up the GC one as well, especially considering it's only \$30. **B+**

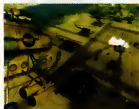
—Carrie Shepherd

FILE SHOWN: WARIOWARE INC.: MEGA PARTY GAMES\$	PRICE: \$29.99
FILE SHOWN: WARIOWARE INC.: MEGA PARTY GAMES\$	PLAYERS: 1-4
FILE SHOWN: WARIOWARE INC.: MEGA PARTY GAMES\$	GENRE: ACTION

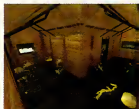
GMR 8¹⁰

BETTER THAN: POKEMON COLOSSEUM
ON PAR WITH: MARIO PARTY 3
WAIT FOR IT: DOCTORATE IN BUTTON MASHING





→ You can customize your in-flight playlist with your own MP3s, but history rings truer with Vietnam's assortment of era-appropriate hits, like Bobby Fuller Four's "I Fought the Law."



GMR
ESSENTIAL
SELECTION

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

GOOD MORNING

TEEN | PC

DEVELOPER EA GAMES
PUBLISHER DIGITAL GLOBE
PRICE \$59.99
RELEASED MARCH
PLAYERS 1-44
REGION SWEDEN

➔ You're separated from your squad, facing the terrible certainty of death in the tall grass. Here comes Chuck, followed by 40 tons of Soviet-made steel with a smug bastard behind the turret, safe in the knowledge that he's encased in the hardest nut to crack in all of Uncle Sam's ill-advised cookout. This is no softheaded A.I., programmed to play a short part in a script designed to highlight your heroism. Behind every pair of enemy eyes is a human opponent hell-bent on sending your ass home in a pine box (or to the Hanoi Hilton, if you're so lucky).

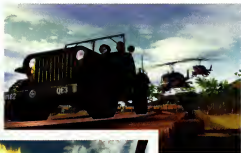
Before your trembling finger can find the radio key that summons help, a

dragon with a bowel full of bushmasters (and one blueleg who's still asking how he disembarks) arrives, breathing suppressing fire. As the Huey sinks into short orbit and your backup hits the ground running, all hell breaks loose. Welcome to Vietnam, soldier.

The rules of engagement remain largely unchanged from those of *Battlefield 1942*. U.S. and NVA forces start each firefight with a fixed allotment of tickets. Because each "combat advisor" killed in action costs one ticket, simple attrition slightly reduces the total, whereas losing ground really taxes your team's resources. To control the land, you must make good use of your specialists, and that's where Vietnam

starts to scream. Your time in the bush radically changes depending on whether you play as a grunt, sharpshooter, heavy-weapon handler, or engineer. So if you get sick of losing sniper duels, you can always sabotage the enemy's motor pool as a sapper.

Going toe-to-toe in an impenetrable tangle of trees changes everything, too, since colored name tags no longer announce the enemy's whereabouts, allowing room for strategy and subterfuge—gomers (or GIs) can and will materialize from the undergrowth. And although the flora is static—you'll see no telltale rustling as tangos creep about or bushes flattened by a chopper's downwash—it certainly beats



← Every bit of the battlefield, Vietnam features several grayed faces of death. The Bouncing Betty springs to waist height and stuffs your gut with shrapnel when tripped, while saboteur bombs sit quietly on vehicles until some poor sap tries to start them. Say good-bye to that Huey, and thank God for respawns.



Rising Sun's plywood cutouts and tropical wallpaper. Most everything is rich, multilayered, and convincingly rendered.

Several games let you play soldier in the sticks; it's what awaits beyond the bush, in the streets of ravaged cities, on the beaten path of access roads, and in the skies above that makes *Vietnam* so electrifying. All the hardware that makes modern warfare hell is here, and from the moment you see the enemy hightail it at the first sound of your F-4 Phantom's engines, you'll know why every FPS—be it set in the future or that fabled galaxy far, far away—is out to imitate the *Battlefield* formula. Piloting takes practice, mind you, and not every combatant is cut from flyboy cloth, but master the art, and you'll soon be

parachuting from burning helos into the cockpits of enemy planes conveniently prepped for takeoff. A kick-ass soundtrack of war anthems accessible from vehicle radios will add to the ambience (unfortunately, videogames weren't around to answer when Edwin Starr asked what war is good for).

Fearsome as they are, *Vietnam's* killing machines aren't without Achilles' heels. Shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles pulverize fast movers as readily as plasticine tears open tanks. In fact, the game is so appreciably balanced that anything goes in each brilliant battle, provided you've got the reflexes and good sense to make it happen. Nonetheless, this war isn't all wine and roses. Skill without strategy is the

slowest route to victory, yet without additional programs like *Roger Wilco*, you can't communicate with your platoon effectively enough to employ them later. Also, from a visual standpoint, little of 1942's aging technology has improved [some scenery actually looks less lifelike]. But even if it's not quite the revolution its predecessor was, EA's latest tour of duty is every bit as rock 'n' roll. **B+**

—Shawn Elliott

GMR 9/10
BETTER THAN PLANETSIDE
ON PAR WITH BATTLEFIELD 1942
WAIT FOR IT: STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT

2ND OPINION

Perchuting out of choppers and jets, manning the turrets on a transport boat, quietly stalking your prey through the thick jungle, barreling a jeep into the enemy camp and jumping out before it crushes three of their guys. It would actually take effort to make this not work. **B+**

—Andrew Plister

CRIMSON SEA 2

MOSES NEED NOT APPLY

TEEN | PS2

➔ If you teleported those intrepid *Dynasty Warriors* from ancient China and planted them in the future against menacing aliens (called, appropriately enough, the Menace), you might get something like *Crimson Sea 2*. If one of these *Dynasty Warriors* happened to have hung out with Dante from *Devil May Cry*, you'd definitely get something like *Crimson Sea 2*. That is, you'd get a fast, frantic action game starring a gun- and sword-wielding fellow fighting legions upon legions of baddies.

For those of you sitting around saying, "I ain't seeing no red ocean here, and there was a *Crimson Sea 1*?" the first game was about a superpowered human fighting mutated critters in space. Just for you, *Crimson Sea 2* has a semi-annoying sidekick whose sole job is to be the repository of all the cut-scenes from the previous game (honestly, that is a pretty decent bonus). Veterans of *Crimson Sea* will be pleased to know that instead of a mere 12 missions, there's now something like, oh, 60. Also, you get double the crimson fun, since there are two playable characters (Sho and Feanay), as opposed to the mere one in the previous game.

Sho is quite a slick Menace-slayer—he slashes, shoots, slows down time, and can even use NeoPsonics (space speak for "magic spells"), which do things like

teleport around the room or conjure meteors from the sky. Feanay has a similar set of moves, but he uses different guns and is generally quicker than Sho (like most videogame heroines compared with their male counterparts).

Controls are generally solid—though it can be tricky to target things and then do the weird "analog stick in the opposite direction you're facing plus Triangle" combo, since you generally end up just turning around like an idiot. The fast action is punctuated by semi-interesting cut-scenes and missions that range from "kill whatever moves" to "fix this doohickey." Besides that, the levels and enemies are pretty boring and utilitarian, rather than imaginative.

Crimson Sea 2, despite lacking red bodies of water, is a solid enough action affair that will hopefully resolve your ongoing debate about whether or not *Dynasty Warriors* can survive in space. **B+**
—Thierry Nguyen

LOW: 80% HIGH: 90% AVERAGE: 84.7%
PEL: NAUGH SCARERS: 3-2
PEL: NAUGH SCARERS: NAUGH

GMR 7th NO ONE BARE

BETTER THAN: DEVIL MAY CRY 2
BUT NOT AS GOOD AS: DYNASTY WARRIORS 4
WAIT FOR IT: GUNSLASH 3



TENCHU: RETURN FROM DARKNESS

THE LIGHT, IT BURNS

MATURE | XB

➔ If you're going to make a stealth game on Xbox—even if it's set in feudal Japan with swords instead of guns—it behooves you to have a little chat with Tom Clancy's personal bodyguard, Sam Fisher. Apparently, developer K2 has yet to be introduced to Mr. Fisher, and *Tenchu: Return from Darkness*, the company's idiosyncratic ninja adventure, suffers for it. In the end, however, *Tenchu* remains mildly compelling all the same.

The most immediate fault you'll find with the game is the lackluster graphics. Never mind that *Tenchu*—on Xbox, mind you—is meant to be a beefier, prettier, online-enabled port of its PlayStation 2 counterpart; the graphics here, while sufficient nicely in portraying a Japanese landscape flickering in the candlelight, do nothing to upgrade the series' visual simplicity on the whole. But even so, *Tenchu* has its moments of intensity. To K2's credit, there's much more emphasis on stealth kills—the meat and potatoes—this time

around. Score enough brutal assassinations per mission, and you'll unlock extra moves for each of the three playable characters, providing much more incentive for perfecting each of these lengthy assignments.

However, unlike Xbox stealth champ *Splinter Cell*, *Tenchu* lacks dynamics. Enemy A.I. is often pitifully predictable, making you and your own missteps (often caused by the game's stilted control) the only challenge in the single-player game. Likewise, the Xbox Live modes are so ill-conceived that practically no joy or strategy can come of the game's handful of co-op and versus maps. *Tenchu*'s biggest saving grace is its patently Japanese manga-style character designs and flair. Based on the ninja tools you're given, as well as the impressive list of solo and team stealth kills, *Tenchu* conveys a sense of cool that games like *Splinter Cell* could only dream of. Sadly, it's just not cool enough. **B-**
—Che Chou



LOW: 80% HIGH: 90% AVERAGE: 84.7%
PEL: NAUGH SCARERS: 3-2
PEL: NAUGH SCARERS: NAUGH

GMR 6th SNAKERY

BETTER THAN: ROGUE OPS
NOT AS GOOD AS: NINJA GAIDEN
WAIT FOR IT: SPT POTION

BREAKDOWN

FISTICUFFS OF THE FUTURE

MATURE | XB

➔ What Namco's created in *Breakdown* is no small achievement. It wouldn't be inaccurate to say that Western development has caught up with the Japanese in terms of graphics and game design, but how often can you say the reverse? We've yet to see a Japanese-developed first-person shooter that stands up to even an average Western FPS, but in what is surely a breakthrough, we're not sure we've ever seen a more convincing first-person action-adventure quite like *Breakdown*.

Starting off in quite a similar fashion to *Halo* (or even *KOTOR*), *Breakdown* introduces us to resident amnesiac Derrick Cole, who is hurtled into a conspiratorial crisis of immediate proportions. At his side is the ever-present sex appeal of the Trinity-inspired Alex, who is a seemingly significant part of Derrick's past, although it's never revealed exactly why at the game's start. What then transpires is an action game set in a first-person perspective that actually works. This isn't some plodding *Shenmue*-lite in which you walk around and talk to morons and spend all your hard-earned cash in vending machines. No, this is a game that plays on the claustrophobic tension that you must surely feel when everything surrounding you is completely alien.

Derrick punches, kicks, throws, and uses a limited assortment of weapons in his quest to find out who he is. In his way are the T'Lann warriors, with whom Derrick seems to share an affinity, if only by way of some glowing fists. The thing that makes *Breakdown* work is that everything feels right. Whether you're whaling on a T'Lann stealth warrior (it feels like *Super Punch-Out* times a million), cracking open a replenishing can of juice, climbing along the ledge of a skyscraper, unloading a clip from your Uzi, or—get this—letting fly with some fireballs, it all works. The controls are practically perfect, allowing for easy maneuvering even when it comes to rolling or even doing backflips. The plot, also, is surprisingly effective and downright creepy at times, making *Breakdown* an even more compelling single-player experience.



Where *Breakdown* stumbles is in the lack of interactivity in the environments. You've got nuclear-powered fists, but you can't punch through a window? Considering Namco itself pioneered blowing stuff up in its arcade classic *Crisis Zone*, you'd be surprised at how much is not unbreakable in *Breakdown*. Some of the environments are repetitious and bland (the endless hallway syndrome) and don't hold a candle to the superbly designed characters. Still, this is riveting stuff; stuff that could truly blossom in the fleshed-out form of a sequel. **B+**

—James Mielke

DEV: NAMCO	PRICE: \$49.95
GEN: XBOX	PLAYERS: 1
AVAIL: NOW	ORIGIN: JAPAN

GMR 8/10

BETTER THAN SHENMUE II
NOT AS GOOD AS DELUS EX
WAIT FOR IT: HALF-LIFE 2



4- These stealthy T'Lann warriors aren't exactly what you'd call "bikes," but they certainly dress the part. That's if you could even see their venky, stealth-camo selves. If you can make one out as it detours the background, while on it quickly! That'll cause their cloak to drop, enabling you to box 'em around even harder. The fighting is definitely the most exciting element in *Breakdown*—and worth the price of admission.



XB



→ Custom Robo offers hundreds of parts with which to tailor your own individual robo. Putting them is easier said than done, however, as the learning curve spikes rather quickly. Despite the fact that this is technically an RPG, it's fairly demanding of the player in terms of reflex and skill. Be warned, this is no turn-based RPG.



GC

CUSTOM ROBO

ROCK THEM. THEN SOCK THEM

TEEN | GC

➔ It's a shame we had to wait this long. Previously manifesting itself as two iterations on Nintendo 64, *Custom Robo* is, in this third installment, a veritable veteran in the world of RPGs. But what exactly is *Custom Robo*?

At its heart, *Custom Robo* functions much in the way *Pokémon* does. You don't have to catch them all, but you do have to beat them all—other robos, that is. That's how conflicts are settled. Much in the way young boys used to flip baseball cards in an era gone by, this futuristic society encourages combatants to throw down the gauntlet (and robos) by setting up virtual arenas on the spot and letting the bots go at it. Beating your opponents advances the

story line, earns you new parts with which to customize your own slick-looking machine, and raises your stature in the game.

The controls of your robo are similar in speed and design to those of Sega's *Virtual-On*, but better, and they don't require any fancy controllers, either: You dash around arenas, using walls as cover, while lobbing all manner of missiles, bombs, rockets and using your machine guns as covering fire. Equipping the proper pieces will determine whether your robo is a speed-evasive dart of a robot or a thundering, brutal tank that relies on strength rather than guile.

Multiplayer action works better than in most games on the Cube because everything is kept on one screen rather than a splitscreen. That doesn't save *Custom Robo* from unfortunate character designs that look like they were designed for a '70s elementary-school textbook, but despite that small wart, this is quality gaming that's both fresh and exciting. **B+**

—James Mielke

2ND OPINION

Like Mielke said, it's about time we got a Custom Robo. There's nothing better in the world—and quilled sci-fi nerds have proven this—than giant robots fighting. Throw in the collectible qualities and amusing single-player story, and you've got a winner. Keep 'em coming, please. **B+**

—Andrew Plister

GMR 8¹⁰

BETTER THAN VIRTUAL-ON MARKZ
NOT AS GOOD AS PHANTOM CRASH
WAIT FOR IT! ARMORED CORE: NEXUS



RAINBOW SIX 3 THE DINGO AIDES AGAIN

MATURE | PS2

➔ Indeed, terror recognizes no borders. Previously found on Xbox, Ubisoft's excellent strategy-shooter *Rainbow Six 3* has jumped over to PS2—a console not particularly known for its graphical prowess. One of the few development studios that can actually make its PS2 games look really, really good is Ubisoft's Shanghai team, and it's managed to bring *Rainbow Six 3* over from Xbox with acceptable casualties.

The heart of the game remains the same: You lead a team of four highly trained operatives through linear levels, rescuing the captured and dispensing covert justice in the name of freedom, apple pie, and reasonable

prices at the pump. Only a few slight changes—aside from the obvious graphical concessions—affect the game: The extensive floor plans found in the Xbox version have been replaced with a simple and far-less-revealing radar (which makes the game harder), the two optional save opportunities have been replaced by automatic saves at designated checkpoints (which makes it easier), and paths through the levels have been slightly altered (which really has no bearing on the game whatsoever).

Ubisoft made an excellent attempt at squeezing every last bit of power from the console, but try as it might, there's only so much that can be done with PS2. The framerate—essential to accurate, high-pressure shooting—gets choppy under certain circumstances, especially when there's lots of smoke and fire involved. But it's still an admirable port. If you already have the Xbox version, you really don't need another one, but PS2 owners should pick it up in a flash...bang. ☛

—Andrew Plister



DEV: UBISOFT
DEV: UBISOFT SHANGHAI
EST. AVAILABLE NOW

PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-4 (ONLINE)
GENRE: SHOOTER

BETTER THAN: RED FACTION II
NOT AS GOOD AS: BODIM II
WONT FOR ITS STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO

EYETOY: GROOVE IT'S OFFICIAL: WE'VE GOT THE FUNK

EVERYONE | PS2

➔ Konami may have a stranglehold on dance-based videogames, but Sony's figured out a cool way to get in on the action. In the inevitable comparison to *Dance Dance Revolution*, not only does *Groove* hold its own, it brings some new and highly entertaining features to the genre.

While *DDR* uses fancy footwork and a dance pad, *Groove* uses Sony's camera peripheral and waving arms. The players themselves are the entertainment; visages and rhythmic arm movements are broadcast onscreen for all to see as the players attempt to hit the right spots at the right times. It's a predictable next step for EyeToy after the *Play* disc of minigames, but it's a good one. Sony chose—probably wisely—a list of more classic dance hits than typical *DDR* fare, ranging from really old school ("Jungle Boogie" by Kool & The Gang) to new school ("Move Your Feet" by Junior Senior), but there are few that are obscure. At 25 plus three unlockable songs, the list is brief, but

the ability to create your own dance routines gives the disc some legs. You can also dance on camera without the scoring, play competitively or cooperatively with friends, or watch music videos. But the *pièce de résistance* for *Groove* is its ability to capture pictures and video on the fly during play for viewing later—a guaranteed shot of hilarity for even the most serious players.

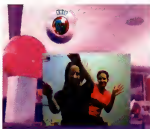
Groove could be the perfect addition to your parties if it wasn't for the fact that EyeToy requires lots of light. If you like your parties glaringly bright, though, it's a hit. ☛

—Carrie Shepherd

PRICE: \$29.99
DEV: SONY
EST. AVAILABLE NOW

PLAYERS: 1-4
GENRE: DANCE

BETTER THAN: EYETOY: PLAY
NOT AS GOOD AS: DDR EXTREME
SET ME AN EYETOY THAT WORKS IN DIM LIGHT



PS2

RETROACTIVE

THIS MONTH WE SHOOT VIRTUAL HOLES IN OUR TV SETS

LIGHTGUN GAMES

SIX VERSIONS OF ONE 20-MINUTE GAME

There's a general rule that says any of these games will be better with an appropriate gun controller—for *Silent Scope* Complete that is Pelican's sniper machine, while for the PS2 games we recommend Namco's *GunCon*. Now on to the games...

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD III
IT'S BETTER THAN THE MOVIE

XB | OCTOBER 2002

➔ Considering the absurdly long development time and reported drastic changes partway through the development, this one isn't all bad. The enemies look great and react with impressive animations, and a shotgun as the default weapon gives the game a different feel than a traditional shooter. But as happens with many long-delayed games, the final product doesn't end up standing out—repetitive enemies and a lack of memorable bosses hold back what is otherwise a visually stunning

game. In many ways, it feels like it was phoned in, since beyond the shotgun, there's nothing special that stands out here. Even the shotgun is not as dramatic as you might expect, since its control is similar to a regular pistol. As a bonus to players, after you beat the game once, you unlock the full version of *The House of the Dead 2*—but in retrospect, this extra game seems more like a way to mask the incredibly short length of *HOTD3* than a cool bonus we should be thankful for. **C-**



NOW... It's too simple now that the looks have worn off.

BORING
6/10

THEN... A fun ride that ends far too early.

BEAUTIFUL
7/10

NOW... One of the four classic games in this genre.

CLASSIC
7/10

THEN... Innovative multiplayer and cool bonus games rule the day.

FRESH
8/10TIME CRISIS II
ALWAYS TRUST YOUR PARTNER

PS2 | SEPTEMBER 2001

➔ The original *Time Crisis* may have introduced the ducking maneuver that lets you play defense against enemy fire (the arcade version had a foot pedal, and you use a button here, but you can simulate the pedal if you put your controller on the floor), but *TC2* is the game in which the idea shows off what it can do. This concept combined with your newly added partner (controlled by a second player or the computer AI) means that the levels have to be

organized in unique ways. The game needs to compensate for two players firing and dodging enemy fire, which sets up some of the most dramatic scenes in a genre known for dramatic scenes. There's nothing quite like watching your partner shoot alongside you as you go. A bunch of minigames top off the package to keep it from being too short-lived, and it all comes together to make this possibly the most respected lightgun game around. **A-**

TIME CRISIS 3
MORE OF THE SAME, IN A GOOD WAY

PS2 | OCTOBER 2003

➔ In many ways, this game is *Time Crisis II*. The environments and the character designs all look better but not much different. You have the same Spanish-style houses and military-influenced enemies. The main gameplay twist this time out is the free-form weapon selection that lets you switch between guns at will, assuming you have enough ammo. The weapons range from a standard pistol to a shotgun to a grenade launcher to a machine gun, and

when you use the machine gun, the game feels exactly like the *Time Crisis* spin-off arcade game *Crisis Zone* but with less destructible environments. The level design limits your ammo as well, so you can't just run through it all with one gun. Additionally, there are bonus modes you unlock once you beat the game, including one that is basically an entire second game. So while every lightgun game ever will be criticized for its length, this is one of the longer-lasting ones. **B+**



NOW... Still a good, solid shooter with a lot to offer.

SOLID
7/10

THEN... One of the best franchises in the business continues admirably.

STRONG
7/10

VAMPIRE NIGHT

SEGA AND NAMCO TRY TO MAKE A CAPCOM GAME

PS2 | NOVEMBER 2001



➔ This one got a fair amount of hype as a rare collaboration between Sega's Wow Entertainment and Namco, but it's actually a pretty traditional shooter. It stays away from new ideas or gimmicks and instead puts its focus on a gothic, *Devil May Cry*-like, stylish presentation. Given that context, some of the crazy flying bosses you see in this type of game feel more at home here than in similar games. Unfortunately, the story never comes together, and we're left with a game that, considering the

pedigree of its developers, doesn't do much special at all. Shoot at the target here, take down the vampire there—you've played this before with different characters. A few training minigames and some unlockables help the game last longer, but with the bland gameplay, we're not sure we really want it to. **E-**

NOW... The style doesn't hold up now that the graphics origins is aging.	SLASH TO 5
THEN... Average but suitable shooter with weird characters.	COOL TO 6

NINJA ASSAULT

SCREW HISTORICAL ACCURACY

PS2 | NOVEMBER 2002

➔ Some may bark at the concept of giving ninjas guns, but lightgun games have always had corny stories, so we'll let that one go. What we won't let go is the lack of polish added to this arcade port, especially since the game was already aging by the time it made its PS2 appearance. Toss in that it's a port of a game that was created on Dreamcast-equivalent hardware, and that it's extremely easy, and you don't have a recipe that brings much to the table. On the plus side, the game is

more stylish than the typical Namco shooter. It has environments ranging from a dojo to the woods, and the actual gunplay is well designed—it's just nothing that you can't get elsewhere. Due to the difficulty level, it's a good game for beginners, though. **E-**

NOW... There's not enough content to make this one last.	UGLY TO 5
THEN... As fun to run through once as any of them.	SPLEEN TO 6



SILENT SCOPE COMPLETE

YOU DON'T COMPLETE ME

XB | FEBRUARY 2004



➔ While on the surface, Complete is a good value—you get three arcade games and a home exclusive in one package for less than a full-price new title—it's easy to tell Silent Scope just doesn't feel at home on consoles. A big part of the appeal for this series lies in the heavy, well-constructed arcade sniper rifle with the high-resolution scope view, and even with the impressively well-made home sniper gun designed specifically for this game, you can't replicate that arcade feeling. It never quite feels like the same

game without leaning over the arcade cabinet. Still, many of the scenes in the game are creative, dramatic, and well scripted, and the sniping design makes you feel more like a real sniper than any other game out there. So if you don't have the arcade comparisons in your head, you may enjoy this one. **E-**

NOW... Um, this just came out.	LACKING TO 6
THEN... Comprehensive but lacking much more.	LACKING TO 6

Finally!

A National
console & PC
Tournament



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Orlando, FL
New Orleans, LA
Houston, TX
San Antonio, TX
Dallas, TX
Atlanta, GA
Nashville, TN
Charlotte, NC
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Jersey City, NJ
Boston, MA
Columbus, OH
Detroit, MI
Indianapolis, IN
Louisville, KY
Chicago, IL
Milwaukee, WI
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MORE

TIPS, CODES, ONLINE, AND MORE

THIS MONTH IN MORE

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL 97
PANDORA TOMORROW
Become invincible online

TOP 10 TIPS: AI 100

How do you get an invulnerable squad in *Silent Storm*? We'll tell you...

CONNECT 102

Tribes: Vengeance is on the way—and so is *Starsiege 2645*

THE LIST 104

We've played 'em all, so we can advise you

DAME GEEZER 110

Dame Geezer speaks out on girl power

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

MULTIPLAYER STRATEGIES AND TIPS



➔ Yeah, Pandora's online multiplayer rocks you like a hurricane. But let's face it—it's got a learning curve like Mt. Everest. Most people will need hours of practice with the controls and a thorough knowledge of the levels before they're even decent at this game, much less a master. Luckily, we here at GMR are all about shortcuts and instant gratification—below are a few general pointers followed by specific tips for both spies and mercs that will help you dominate your online foes in no time.

THE BASICS

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Read the instruction booklet and take both the spy and merc tutorials. That's right Mr. [or Ms.] I'm-too-cool-for-instruction-booklets, read over the entire multiplayer section. This is a complex game with a ton of different controls, many of which you may not know about even after playing for hours. Still don't think you need to bother? OK, hotshot, do you know how to fire grenades farther? [Hold down the left trigger before letting go.] Did you know you can change

your rate of fire as a merc? [Hold down X.] Or how to set a mine with a laser trip wire? [Hold down the button when you plant the mine and a menu will pop up.] Or that you can immediately pull out your weapon after a roll? [Push X mid-cartwheel.] I think I proved my point. Read it!

KNOW THY LEVELS

As Abraham Lincoln once said, "90 percent of success in multiplayer *Splinter Cell* comes from knowing the maps." It's not enough just to have a handle on the general layout—you gotta know those suckers backward and forward: every route in and out of a room, every pipe, every air duct, every everything! As a merc, pay particular attention to good spots to lay mines and shortcuts between objectives; the fastest route to get somewhere may involve falling off a ledge, so look for crates or other items you can use to break your fall and avoid taking damage. As a spy, note all the locations of laser trip wires and motion detectors, and try to find dark or out-of-the-way locations from which to safely shoot at them. Don't forget that you can run around all the levels in single-player mode as both a spy and a merc so you don't embarrass yourself online.

SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE

It's very important for you and your teammate to quickly settle on names for the various parts of the level so you can quickly tell each other where you are (or where the enemy is). You should choose obvious names that anyone can understand, like "the red hallway" or "the crate room," instead of stuff like "the dark hallway" or "that one room with the door."

MIX IT UP

Repetition is death. Keep walking the same route, placing mines in the same place, hitting the same objectives first—keep doing anything your enemies can predict and you're screwed. Also, if you have any particularly good tricks (like some of the advanced techniques we are going to show you), you might want to save them for the crucial final minutes or last rounds of a match.



In general, the must-have gadgets for the spies are smoke grenades and spy bullets. Frag grenades, mines, and spy traps are essential for the mercs. You should choose your other two items based on the particular level you're playing.

XB

PC

ADVANCED SPY TECHNIQUES

PULL A CHEWBACCA

Like any offensive spy technique, this one is tricky, but there's nothing like the feeling of successfully pulling it off. One spy finds an isolated merc (it's crucial that the other merc is not around) and gets spotted on purpose. When the merc pursues his prey, the other spy comes up from behind and grabs him—this is known as "getting Chewbaccaed," after the trick the Wookiee and Han Solo pulled on that probe droid at the start of *Empire*.



MISINFORMATION

Find a spy trap and intentionally set it off. Now the mercs can listen in on what you're saying. Muuhahaha! Have a conversation in which you and your partner talk about both of you going to the same part of the level—the part farthest away from where you are actually going. If the mercs take the bait, you might get one or both of them too far away to stop you from hitting your real objective. Make sure your partner knows what you are doing beforehand so he doesn't get confused.

HAVE AN ESCAPE PLAN

Always have an idea of where you are going to run if you get spotted, especially when hacking an objective; otherwise, you'll just run in a panic and get killed. Is there a wall nearby that you can climb over that the merc can't? A duct the merc will have to crawl through superslowly? Also, remember that narrow hallways are your friends—you can run down one and drop a smoke grenade behind you, so if the merc tries to follow, he'll fall asleep.



CAMPER KILLER

A lot of mercs will simply decide to stay within a few feet of an objective, planting mines and spy traps and just generally being annoying. This is known as "camping," but don't worry, it's a good thing for you as a spy. Remember what we said about not being predictable? Well, if a merc is staying in one place, he's being predictable. You have a few options: Start a smoke grenade into the area, nail him with a spy bullet from afar and move on, shoot a spy camera nearby and gas him, or our favorite, kill him by shooting one of his own mines.

STOP AND LISTEN

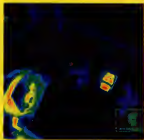
Crank the sound on your TV and use your ears—you can hear motion detectors, cameras, and mines before it's too late. Approaching footsteps can also serve as an early warning, although mercs move so fast that it's not a good thing to rely on.

BUM RUSH

If a single merc is guarding an objective and the other is nowhere in sight, consider just running right up and attacking with both spies. With the element of surprise and confusion from a few well-placed smoke grenades, one of you should be able to get behind him. And even if one of you gets shot, the other will probably have enough time to hack the objective the merc was guarding.



As a spy, you never want to stay in any one vision mode for too long. In general, heat detection is the fastest way to spot traps and enemies, but mercs with EMF vision enabled will be able to spot you easily, even through walls, so switch visions often.



ADVANCED MERC TECHNIQUES

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Right as the round begins, you and your partner should divide up the level and start to place mines and spy traps around different areas. After you've set up enough booby traps in one part, it's a good idea to move on to the next one; keep rotating from one area to another throughout the round. In general, you should only be near your partner if he's in trouble and needs help.

KEEP IT MOVING

Unless you know where a spy is or you're trying to stay hidden, you should never stop moving as a merc. If the enemy gets a bead on you, they can plant spy bullets, hit you with sticky-cam gas, or worse. And don't pace back and forth or run circular laps—if you move predictably, a spy can get behind you and GANK, you're dead.

MINE PLACEMENT: DOS AND DON'TS

Mines give off a little noise, but most players will locate them by sight, so place them around corners or especially under openings you think spies might drop down from. Placing mines close to objectives is generally a good idea: It's the one place spies will be looking for them every time, but it also slows them down out in the open while they disarm the mines. Better yet, if a spy starts to hack an objective, you can lob a frag grenade in from far away and set off all the nearby mines, saving yourself some time.

SUICIDE SOLUTION

Try to save one frag grenade to kill yourself with. Yep, you read that right. Respawning is the only way you're going to replenish grenades, mines, and other important gadgets, so if you have the extra lives, it's better to die by your own hand when you know you have some time (like right after you kill an enemy) rather than let the enemy get to an objective. If you're out of grenades, you can take a big fall or have your partner shoot you.

TRICKSY HOBBITSES

If you think a spy bullet might've hit you, use the headset to lie about where you are going and see if you can lure a spy out into the open. A good way to keep this from confusing your fellow merc is to establish some kind of code beforehand. For example, any sentence that starts with "OK" is a lie and should be ignored.

BLACKOUT

Kill the flashlight except when absolutely necessary, and even then, turn it off as soon as possible. The flashlight is the easiest way for the spies to spot you, even from far away; plus, it tells them exactly what direction you are facing. You might as well just hang a big neon sign on your helmet saying, "Hey, spies! I'm over here! Come strangle me from behind!" Turn off that target. ☹



If you know a level well enough, running around with motion-detection vision always on isn't such a bad idea. Only spies clever enough to spot your red visor and baiting enough to stay perfectly still out in the open will gain an advantage.



XB

PC



A.I.

HIS CODES ARE REAL. BUT HE IS NOT

Tired of waiting for Halo 2? Pass the time with these codes. They include games based on two guys blasting up city streets and cute anime characters blasting each other with fireballs. We've even thrown in Sonic the Hedgehog for good measure.

01 MAX PAYNE 2 PS2/XB

➔ *Max Payne 2* is a gritty, interactive film noir about love, loss, and guns, guns, guns. That's why we love it.

PS2
To unlock all levels and all game modes: During gameplay, press X, X, X, Square, Square, X, Left, Right, Left, Right, Square, Square, Square, X, Left, Right, Left, Right. Return to the Main menu, and the under the New Game menu, all modes will be playable.

Xbox
To unlock all levels and all game modes: During gameplay, press X, X, X, A, Left, Right, Left, Right, X, X, X, A, Left, Right, Left, Right. Return to the Main menu, and under the New Game menu, all modes will be unlocked.



02 MX UNLEASHED PS2/XB

➔ There are a bunch of codes you can use to unlock the various bonuses in THQ's latest *MX* masterpiece. Enter them at the Cheat Code screen—if you've done them properly, they will remain on the screen.

Supercross tracks
National tracks
Freestyle tracks
Pro physics
Expert A.I.
Unlock all the machines
500cc bikes
500cc bikes
Career completion
A.I. bowling

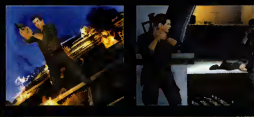
STUPERCROSS
ECONATION
BUSTBIG
SWAPPIN
OBTOFAST
MINIGAMES
SQUIRRELDOD
BIGDOGS
CLAPPEDOUT
WRECKINGBALL



03 JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING PS2/XB/PC

➔ Think you're as cool as Pierce Brosnan? Here's the breakdown on what you can unlock in EA's new *Bond* title. Once you've earned the items, they're yours for the game. To earn a Platinum rating, you must be playing on 00 Agent difficulty and complete the level's Platinum Challenge in a single run. Good luck, Bond.

Item earned	Platinum ratings required
Golden gun	1
Improved traction	3
Improved battery	5
Double ammo	7
Double damage	9
Full ammo	11
Cloak	13
Full battery	15
All weapons	17
Unlimited battery	19
Unlimited ammo	23
Slow-mo driving	25
Platinum gun	27



04 YU-GI-OH! WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP 2004 GBA

➔ If you're having trouble mastering the complex gameplay of *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, you can always use boosters to even the odds—but you have to know how to get them. Each booster must be earned by defeating the appropriate duelist 10 times. Here's how to get each. [Note that losses and ties do not affect your total win count.]

Booster	Duelist
Blue Millennium	Rare Hunter
Blue/Green Millennium	Strings
Dark Ruler Hades	Bandit Keith
Gold Millennium	Odion
Guardian Sphinx	Pegasus
Jinzo	Weevil
Purple Millennium	Umbra and Luminis
Red Millennium	Arkana
Relinquished	Rex Raptor
The Masked Beast	Maku Tsunami
Thousand-eyes Restrict	Bonz
Toon Summoned Dragon	Espa Roba
Yamata Dragon	Joey Wheeler
Zombrya the Dark	Mai Valentine



Needle Ceiling

05 S.W.A.T.: GLOBAL STRIKE TEAM PS2/XB

➔ If you're tired of the usual chaos that explodes in Los Angeles and would rather see the rest of the world, use this code on the Mission Select screen to unlock every level the game has to offer: Up, L1, Down, R1, Left, L1, Right, R1, Up.



06 SONIC HEROES PS2/N64

➔ To earn the game's true ending, beat story mode with each team and collect all seven Chaos Emeralds by finding the keys on the levels before each boss fight and holding on to them when you finish the level. Once you have all seven, scroll to the right past Team Chaotix to fight Metal Sonic, the game's true boss.



07 BATTLESTAR GALACTICA PS2

➔ Although Lorne Greene isn't anywhere in sight, you can still experience the nostalgia of this classic series. If you want to fly with Starbuck and Apollo as your wingmen, go to the Extra menu and make sure your cursor is at the top of the screen, highlighting "renders." Then enter **Down, Down, Left, Down, Down, Up, Right, Right**. If you've done it correctly, you'll hear the ominous voice of a Cylon.



08 TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A. PS2

➔ We ran some *True Crime* codes a few issues back, but we found a few more. Pause the game and go the Map screen. From there, enter these codes. If you've done it correctly, you'll hear the "good cop" sound effect. If you want to play as Snoop Dogg, enter the code, save your game, then go back to the Level Select screen. There will be a Snoop Dogg icon in the upper left-hand corner.

Unlock impound-garage cars
Unlock Snoop Dogg
Up, Right, Down, Left, Up, X
R1, L1, Up, Right, Left, Down, L3, R3, X, Square,
Circle, Triangle



09 DRAGON BALL Z: TAIKETSU GBA

➔ The *Dragon Ball Z* mythology has dozens of characters—but you're going to have to work for the cooler ones. Here's how to get them.

Android 16 Win tournament mode as Android 16.
Cell Win tournament mode as Android 16.
Bulma Win tournament mode with every character (including all unlockables).
Buu Win tournament mode as Piccolo.
Frieza Finish time challenge mode as Vegeta.
Gotenks Finish time challenge mode as Gohan.
Nappa Win tournament mode as Vegeta.
Raditz Win tournament mode as Gohan.



10 SILENT STORM PC

➔ If you're having trouble with this squad-based title, give this a try. It might sound complicated, but it's quite simple. Go to the *Silent Storm*'s "cfg" folder on your hard drive and edit the file "autoexec.cfg." Just add "wirbelwind" to the very end (don't use quotation marks). This enables the in-game console, which you can activate by pressing the Tilde key (''). You can then enter the codes below. 1 turns on a code, and 0 turns it off.

Code	Description
game_noai 1	Disable artificial intelligence
Lam_an_alien 1	Everybody including enemies becomes transparent; this happens only after loading a saved game
getitem x	Get item number x
setxplevel x	Set all squad members to x level
cheat_showall 1	Show all enemies including NPCs
godmode 1	Squad becomes invulnerable



CONNECT

CLANMADE TIE-IN MOD TO SHIP WITH TRIBES: VENGEANCE

ONLINE GAMING

LIFE AS A SPY

The darkness is my friend, if not my own personal savior. In *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow*, the darkness serves as Sam Fisher's greatest tool. In the game's online mode—called *Shadow Strike* for a darn good reason—it's what separates the quick from the dead. Or, in more certain terms: me from the suckers.

Spies like me play the game in third person, and they're pitted against mercenaries who operate in first-person mode. They want to kill me. I want, depending on the mode, to steal electronic gizmos or disarm them. The mercenaries pack powerful weaponry, whereas the spies go with nonlethal guns and grenades.

I'm sneaking through the ventilation shafts in a movie theater. Why someone would store top-secret electronic equipment in the same place they put the *Jim Carrey* flicks is beyond me, but it's undignified for spies to question their lot in life. Below me, the mercenaries work feverishly to plant mines to trip me up, but I know their plans as they're being formulated: While one of my enemies was unsuccessfully attempting to ventilate me, I nailed him with a spy dart that lets me listen in to the other guy's conversations. It sucks to be them, and to those who would argue it's mathematically impossible to be a world-class spy while sitting on the couch in your boxer shorts while eating macaroni and cheese straight from the pot, I say one thing: Behind the modern age. **1E**

Greg Orlando is a senior editor at Xbox Nation.

MECH ASSAULT

NEXT CHAPTER IN THE STARSIEGE SAGA IS ON THE WAY

NEWS

➔ While Irrational Games is hard at work on *Tribes: Vengeance*—the next title in Sierra's jetpack-powered *Tribes* series—the fan-based ClanCore Design Group is busy with a tie-in project of its own. Having secured Sierra's full blessing and support, the folks at ClanCore are developing a full conversion mod for the game, titled *Starsiege 2845*.

Longtime fans of the *Tribes* franchise (and its venerable forbear, *Earthsiege*) will recognize the *Starsiege* name, since it is the original universe in which *Tribes* takes place. *Starsiege 2845* casts aside *Tribes*' signature jetpack-focused gameplay, opting instead for a full-on helping of giant mech combat. Plenty of new weapons and vehicle options will be available, as well as numerous gameplay modes for single and multiple players, making for a fresh gameplay experience that harkens back to the *Tribes* series' roots.

Sierra has given its full support to the project, which is otherwise a complete labor of love. It has even gone so far as to lend professional talent to ClanCore's efforts: Blake Hutchins, the lead author of the original *Starsiege* and the previous two *Tribes* games, is lending his writing talents to the single-player campaign story line. Plans also call for the full mod to be included with the retail version of *Tribes: Vengeance*, effectively giving fans two complete games right out of the box. *Tribes: Vengeance* and *Starsiege 2845* are scheduled to ship



Free MeV Anniversary download! 21 June 2004
Starsiege 2845: A full conversion mod for Tribes: Vengeance

in late 2004. For more information, check out the official *Starsiege* website (www.starsiege2845.com/), as well as the ClanCore Design Group's own site (www.clancore.net/). **1E**
—Ryan Scott



DOWNLOAD THIS! ➔

Every month, we'll pick three of the most interesting or appropriate downloads we come across. Like these!

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004 DEMO

www.unrealtournament.com/



The newly released multiplayer demo for the upcoming *Unreal Tournament 2004* is already one of the most downloaded game demos ever—and with good reason. If you're an FPS fan, you need to check this out. **1E**

CITY OF HEROES OPENING CINEMATIC

www.cityofheroes.com/



It's been around for a while, but we think this trailer is worth a look—especially since *City of Heroes* is just around the corner and looks like it's going to be one of the biggest MMO games of 2004. **1E**

ZUMA DELUXE

www.popcap.com/



The folks at PopCap are disturbingly efficient at creating simple yet addictive puzzle games. Their latest batch of digital crack is the color-matching game *Zuma*—head over to check it out, along with PopCap's other great games! **1E**

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN



DRAGOON/RANGER

MAIN JOB LEVEL: 15
SUB JOB LEVEL: 8
NATION: WINDURST
RACE: HUME
SERVICE: SIREN
PROMISE: ROUNDABOUTS



Carbuncle get!



The rainbow connection

→ Whenever a summoner is born, they say that a rainbow appears in the sky to mark the occasion. Well, that's the Milkman's rainbow (above), and yes, he is now a summoner.



→ This month, I was definitely on fire. With the help of some friends (Wraeth, Lyonheart, Bluescorpion, Onidragon), I managed to complete the **Three Kingdoms** quest, defeat a cranky dragon, and achieve rank 3, which grants me access to more rewarding quests and more exotic conquest items.

Also, I did reach level 30, thanks to a productive run in the jungles outside of Kazham, but that achievement alone doesn't tell the entire story. In order to merely get to Kazham, I had to get three keys. Luckily, I had Wraeth around to help me. She basically led me around Vana'Diel to all the locations where creatures drop keys to Kazham. It took a little while, but we were done in a few hours. Talk about a guided tour!

I also got—in quantity, I might add—some advanced jobs. The first advanced job I secured was that of a **summoner**. It took a lot of running around, trying to expose my **carbuncle** ruby to the proper weather conditions required, to finish the quest, but it was relatively easy overall. The second advanced job I snared was that of a **samurai**. This one was less with the

running around (although getting to Norg, where the SAM quest begins, isn't exactly easy), and more with the quick completion, due to Wraeth and a high-level dark knight named **Drakul**. Thanks, Drak!

My third advanced job, and the one I'm devoting the most time to, is **dragoon**. This one involved a lot of running back and forth and is way tedious until the point where you fight a dragon to finish the quest. Wraeth and I actually did this quest together and have been leveling our dragoon jobs (and wyverns **Sasavi** and **Qiqiru**) simultaneously. Dragoons are so awesome; put a pair of dragoons and their pet wyverns together, and it's like landing four attacks at once on whatever hapless enemies you're fighting. Plus, the jump attack you earn at level 10 is fantastic.

The last advanced job I completed as of press time was for **Paladin**, which I did simply because I was already helping Lyonheart get his (he's now a **PALWARR**). But my thanks go out to **Wraeth**, my constant companion since we met last month. Without her, I wouldn't be half the character I am today. ✦
—James Mielke



THE LIST

GMA'S EXHAUSTIVE GUIDE TO THE ONLY GAMES THAT MATTER

BUYERS' GUIDE

PS2 TOP 100 A VEITABLE FEAST

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Jack/Mutation	Bandai	We've exhausted our supply of "something within a something" jokes, so just know that the series starts to pick up in this sequel.	8
Amplitude	Sony	A whole slew of new artists who, naturally, bring along brand-new tunes for your button-pressing pleasure.	8
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Interplay	A beautiful-looking Dungeons & Dragons-based hack-n-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	Rayman creator Michel Ancel has done it again. BG&E is a spectacular adventure.	9
Bombastic	Capcom	Kudos to Capcom for bringing over the excellent Devil Dice series. Roll those dice, daddy needs a new pair of DualShocks.	8
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	An RPG that forces you to die and start over multiple times? It sounds ridiculous, but it actually works.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An aggressive driving simulation that defies the rules of physics. Includes a dedicated crash mode for aspiring demolition-derby stars.	8
Capcom vs. SNK 2	Capcom	Take the best elements of Street Fighter and King of Fighters, and you'll have the best thing going in the world of 2D combat.	8
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	Konami	The Castlevania franchise goes 3D (again!). It's different from what we're used to, but it's still good.	8
Champions of Norrath	Sony Online	A hefty, highly replayable top-down action-RPG that outclasses Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II.	8
Chaos Legion	Capcom	Storm through 15 levels of nonstop action, commanding various squads of bodyguards. It's like Devil May Cry, only not so antisocial.	8
Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	A superb rally racer with superrealistic properties—right down to the extended time you spend sitting in the Ford Focus.	8
Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	After numerous shoddy attempts to bring the classic Contra gameplay to a next-gen system, Konami finally gets it right.	8
Dance Dance Revolution: DDRMax	Konami	Before, if you wanted to play DDR, you had to subject yourself to Joe and Jane Public. Now you can embarrass yourself at home.	8
Dark Cloud 2	Sony	Improves upon the first one in every way imaginable. Building and upgrading weapons to your liking is a blast.	9
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Acclaim	Before turning to Larry Flynt for inspiration, XXX was based on the well-mannered Dave Mirra and actually focused on biking.	8
Devil May Cry	Capcom	Did you know Devil May Cry was going to be Resident Evil 4 before it was spun off as its own series? Oh, you did? Never mind, then.	8
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	Atlus	Aside from being a fantastically deep strategy game, Disgaea is also the funniest strategy-RPG we've ever played.	8
Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	Melose combat set in ancient China. Enemies number in the hundreds along branching story paths.	8
Escape From Monkey Island	LucasArts	LucasArts has a fine tradition of putting out excellent graphical adventure games, and this latest charmer is no exception.	9
ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega	It's the best-looking basketball game this year, and it's marginally the best-playing one, too.	8
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top Madden.	8
ESPN NHL Hockey	Sega	The game formerly known as NHL 2K(x), where (x) is the last digit of the year we're in. Oh yeah, it's still really good.	8
Fatal Frame 2	Tecmo	One of the downright creepiest ghost stories you'll ever experience. It also doubles as a fun game!	8
Final Fantasy X	Square EA	PS2's first Final Fantasy does away with the traditional overworld but introduces full voice acting. Artistically beautiful, as always.	9
Final Fantasy X-2	Square EA	Yuna and company put a fresh set of clothes on Final Fantasy X's gameplay. Hey, ladies!	9
Gran Turismo 3 A-spec	Sony	Core gameplay is unchanged, but the graphics get a complete overhaul, which makes GT3 the best-playing/looking sim on the market.	10
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Containing both Grand Theft Auto III and Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, this is the value of the year. Now go get your mob on.	10
Guitar Hero XX	Sammy	Tired of waiting for Street Fighter 4? This one should more than compensate. Great visuals, great control, and great extras.	8
Hully Putter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	J.K. Rowling's fantasy sport is surprisingly playable in videogame form. We wonder what Sega's ESPN Quidditch would be like...	8
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best baseball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	8
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Edios	Most of the problems with the original Hitman have been fixed, making this one of the more rewarding action games on PS2.	9
Hot Shots Golf 3	Sony	Some golf games need something extra to attract gamers. How about arcade-style control, annoying taunts, and multiplayer modes?	8
Ico	Sony	An underappreciated work of art with challenging puzzles, fantastic lighting, and engrossing character relationships.	9
Jak II	Sony	Jak II tries to be everything to all gamers, and it ends up getting a lot of it right, but it's still derivative.	8
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	Electronic Arts	Not a cheap cash-in, but not quite GoldenEye.	8
K-1 Grand Prix	Konami	The budding sport of K-1 is faithfully represented here, as are the knockout blows to the jaw that sound just as painful as they look.	8
Karaoke Revolution	Konami	Can't carry a tune? Seriously, this game is still for you. Bring on the append discs!	8
Kill-Switch	Namco	Namco's action-shooter uses the concept of cover to create battles with intensity. Not that battles usually aren't intense, mind you....	8
Kingdom Hearts	Square EA	When the amazing, talented artists from Square join forces with the amazing, talented artists from Disney, good things happen.	8
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best LOTR effort, an improvement on The Two Towers that looks fantastic.	8
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	Electronic Arts	Anything bearing the valuable Lord of the Rings license will sell well. Happily, there's more to this best-up-than just the name.	8
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	Now this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
The Mark of Kri	Sony	A slick action game with innovative controls. Each button is assigned to a different enemy, allowing for combat with multiple targets.	9
Maximus: Ghosts to Glory	Capcom	It's the spiritual successor to the classic Ghosts 'n Goblins, complete with heart burners and insane difficulty.	8
Maximo vs. Army of Zin	Capcom	Improves upon the original Maximo in every conceivable way: better graphics, better camera, and a better pace.	8
MDK 2: Armageddon	Interplay	Much improved over the original Dreamcast incarnation, MDK 2: Armageddon is one of the better recent action games.	8
Medal of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	A strong single-player campaign paves the way through the beaches of Normandy and the heart of France. Great audio.	8
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	There's a lot in this update: 350 VR missions, 150 alternate missions, five Snake Tales, and one skateboard. Yes, a skateboard.	8
MotoGP 3	Namco	After three attempts, Namco got it right...sort of. The realism is astounding, as long as you ignore the giant Mr. Driller.	8

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATINGS
NASCAR Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts	It's a lot like last year's version of <i>Thunder</i> , only better. Obviously for NASCAR fans.	9
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of <i>Live</i> ? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, Vol. 2 takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent NCAA 2003, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	Electronic Arts	Strangely, the game's best version is on the least-powerful hardware. Running from cops has never been this fun or consequence free.	9
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
NHL Nitro Pro	Midway	It's hardly realistic, but it's not supposed to be. It's also the closest we'll ever get to a new <i>Ice Hockey</i> or <i>Blades of Steel</i> .	8
NFL Street	Electronic Arts	It's like football, except more fun.	7
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny	Capcom	The effort put forth in defeating Nobunaga in <i>Onimusha</i> has gone to waste, as he's risen from the dead to appear in the sequel.	8
Onimusha: Warlords	Capcom	Survival-horror with a taste for feudal Japan, gorgeous artistic design, and a whole lot more action than its <i>Resident Evil</i> kin.	9
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...if only the camera were more manageable.	8
Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando	Sony	<i>Going Commando</i> borrows ingredients from other genres and makes a giant casserole of awesome.	9
Rayman 2: Revolution	Ubisoft	One of the best 3D platformers available, the <i>Rayman</i> franchise doesn't get the attention it deserves.	9
Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	Capcom	More of a true sequel than <i>Resident Evil 3</i> , <i>Veronica's</i> Dreamcast debut meant many fans missed out. Problem solved!	9
Resident Evil	Sega	A fairly standard shooter dressed as a visual and aural masterpiece. Sadly unappreciated by the vast majority of the gaming world.	8
R-Type Final	Edios	<i>R-Type</i> does its swan song with all the joyful intensity you could ask for.	9
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	Tecmo	This Greek-mythology-based action game is an update of the arcade and NES classic in name only. Fun combat and great music.	9
Sega Sports Tennis	Sega	Arcade-style tennis perfection when it launched for Dreamcast. It's holding up just as well on PS2.	9
Silent Hill 3	Konami	The third chapter of this grisly horror show once again has you running down dark hallways with a flashlight.	8
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good Simpsons game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
The Sims	Electronic Arts	A new mode helps you figure out how to keep your Sim from pissing himself. Or, if you're like that, how to make him do it.	9
The Sims: Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	All the familiar goodness of <i>The Sims</i> , but now with branching career paths that will take you forever to finish.	9
Sky Gunner	Atari	If you can look past the slowdown issue (and that's a pretty big issue at times), <i>Sky Gunner</i> is great shooting fun.	8
Sly Cooper and the Thieves' Raccoonus	Sony	A solid platformer with a unique aesthetic and animations. Lacks a little in the challenge department, it's a little on the short side, too.	9
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony	Possibly the best reason to own a PS2 Network Adaptor: The team-based military tactics work better online than off.	9
SOCOM II	Sony	Everything you loved about the first <i>SOCOM</i> now with less of everything you didn't like so much.	9
Soul Calibur II	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as <i>VF4: Evolution's</i> .	9
Space Channel 5: Special Edition	Agekic	Shake your groove thing, shake your groove thing, yeah! Includes the original <i>Space Channel 5</i> and its sequel.	9
SpyHunter	Midway	Are creation of the classic that manages to avoid tarnishing all the good memories, which can't be said for a lot of classic remakes.	8
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best <i>SSX</i> yet.	9
Sub Rebellion	Metro3D	Customizable submarines rule the waters of the future. <i>Sub Rebellion</i> is an action game that's short on graphics but very entertaining.	8
Tekken Tag Tournament	Namco	Essentially <i>Tekken 3</i> with enhanced graphics and tag teaming. Which isn't bad, considering <i>Tekken 3</i> is a great game to begin with.	7
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	Activision	<i>Tenchu</i> sneaked onto the list without us noticing. We were drunk on sake and telling tales of heroism, so that might be why.	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	<i>Tiger Woods</i> made golf cool (sort of). <i>Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004</i> makes golf games cool (sort of).	8
Timesplitters 2	Edios	Everything good about the original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes, too.	8
Tokyo Xtreme Racer Zero	Crave	Cruise Tokyo's highways in search of less-than-legal street-racing action. Despite some visual issues, it's definitely worth checking out.	8
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	As expected, the PS2 port of the Xbox original takes a graphical hit. Doesn't mean it's not still a great game, though.	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft dropped the two-minute time limit in career mode and added an array of objectives. Level design is a step up from <i>THPS3's</i> .	9
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of <i>THUG's</i> customizable gameplay make it the best <i>Hawk</i> yet.	10
Twisted Metal: Black	Sony	With the franchise safely out of the hands of 1985 Studios, <i>Twisted Metal</i> makes a welcome return to its former gruesome glory.	9
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	The greatest 3D fighter ever created, and it's only a measly \$20. Move the lawn, twice, and it's yours.	10
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the <i>Tony Hawk</i> formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	9
War of the Monsters	Sony	King Kong's agent wanted a cool \$20 mil. for this fun beat-'em-up, but Sony balked and went with the less-recognizable <i>Congar</i> .	9
Wild Arms 3	Sony	A grand adventure with a Wild West theme, endearing characters, great music, and a refreshingly uncomplicated battle system.	9
Winning Eleven 7	Konami	Enough tweaks to warrant a purchase, even if you own the last <i>Winning Eleven</i> .	9
Wipeout Fusion	Bam	The Designer's Republic touch may be missing, but the series' oft-limited, never-surpassed style of racing remains intact.	9
WWE SmackDown! Here Comes the Pain	THQ	Much better than the previous <i>SmackDown!</i> , <i>HCP</i> improves the previously flawed grappling system.	8
Xenonauts	Namco	A massive RPG with an epic story and length. Namco's now in charge of the <i>Xeno</i> series, and this is the first of many planned chapters.	9
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	Better enemies, better pacing, better music, better stages, and better weapons. What we're trying to say is, <i>ZONE2</i> is better than the first.	8

[BUY!]

KARAOKE REVOLUTION

→ Gather the gang, fire up that mic, and get the party started. Bad singers welcome (adds a nice bit of humor, not). Hams encouraged.



[AVOID!]

AMERICAN IDOL

→ Pull this out to quickly end the party. It requires no talent, either the vocal or rhythmic button-mashing variety, but sadly, it also lacks any entertainment value.



PC TOP 50 REMARKABLY SIMILAR TO APRIL'S LIST

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Aliens vs. Predator 2	Sierra	Three completely different first-person shooters combined into one dark and terrifying gaming experience.	9
Armed & Dangerous	LucasArts	Tea-drinking robots and guns that fire sharks. What else could you possibly ask for?	9
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn	Interplay	The rare occasion when the sequel to a classic goes above and beyond its predecessor. Can't wait for III.	9
Battlefield 1942	Electronic Arts	Multiplayer shooter set in WWII that lets you jump in and out of vehicles (even planes!) while battling dozens of your friends.	9
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	Infogrames	If you like adventure games that offer challenging puzzles and great visuals, then cozy up to <i>The Sleeping Dragon</i> .	9
Civilization III	Activision	Sid Meier's classic just keeps rolling along, getting bigger and more complex while somehow managing to remain just as addictive.	10
Day of Defeat	Valve	You won't need to upgrade your videocard to play this teamplay-focused WWII shooter. What a refreshing concept.	8
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Ubisoft	<i>Invisible War</i> , much like the first <i>Deus Ex</i> , is a game whose better moments far outweigh its lesser ones.	9
Diablo II: Lords of Destruction	Blizzard	The sequel to the ultimate dungeon-crawling clickfest should please anyone who wasted their teens playing the first game.	9
Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	Hack-n-slash doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes, it can even be in beautiful 3D with no loading time between levels.	8
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	The definitive open-ended RPG epic. Sort of like GTA3, but with magic, elves, and all that D&D flava.	9
EverQuest	Sony Online	The MMORPG that's so addictive, it makes crack seem like Sanka. Play this game at your own risk.	9
EverQuest: The Scars of Velious	Sony Online	The expansion pack to <i>EverQuest</i> opens up new worlds, new characters, and tigers with boobies (finally!).	9
Fallout Tactics	Interplay	Squad-based tactical strategy game (set in the same universe as the classic <i>Fallout</i> RPG) that gives a new standard.	9
Final Fantasy XI	Square Enix	If you possess the patience and the money for the monthly fee, <i>FFXI</i> is a rewarding MMORPG experience.	8
Freedom Force	Electronic Arts	Clever use of strategy and RPG elements helps make this witty comic-book-superhero-themed game one of the best.	10
Freelancer	Microsoft	It's not as simplistic as some might expect a PC-space shooter to be, but that's part of its charm. Random missions keep the fun going.	8
Ghost Recon Island Thunder	Ubisoft	This top-notch mission pack makes a decent modern-combat simulation into an outstanding one.	8
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Interplay	A shooter/strategy hybrid full of weird British humor, unique and beautiful 3D graphics, and naked-lady sea monsters.	9
Grand Prix 4	Infogrames	It's a tough choice for Formula One fans; GP4 and F1 2002 are both worthy of your hard-earned dollars.	9
Grand Theft Auto III	Rockstar Games	The poster child for all that's wrong in gaming is check-chill of all that's fun in gaming. And you get to import your own MPGs.	10
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	The PC version of the hit game sports a higher resolution, custom MP3 soundtracks, and mouse-look for easier killing.	10
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Edios	An almost perfect blend of action and stealth, it's a huiusvogue improvement over the first game.	9
IL-2 Sturmovik	Ubisoft	Amazingly realistic WWII flight sim covering a region seldom visited in computer games, the Eastern Front.	9
Koban: Alhambra's Gift	Strategy First	Surprisingly accessible fantasy-themed real-time strategy game that's as much fun in single player as it is against other mages online.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
Max Payne	G.O.D.	Despite some corny writing, this überhip noir videogame feels like a movie but plays like a great action game.	8
Medals of Honor Allied Assault	Electronic Arts	Worth it just for the incredibly intense D-Day mission that almost matches the same scene in <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> .	9
Medieval: Total War	Activision	The ultimate historical strategy game has everything from political intrigue to sweeping real-time battles.	9
Motorcross Madness 2	Microsoft	It's mud-spattering, off-road superspeed fun with this free-wheeling dirt-bike simulator from the makers of <i>ATV Offroad Fury</i> .	9
NASCAR Racing 2003	Vivendi Universal	It's the final installment of the series, and it's also the best. There's not much new, but everything's been tweaked to near perfection.	9
Neverwinter Nights	Infogrames	If you're a D&D nerd, then you already know, but buy this one especially for the multiplayer and user-made mods.	9
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Atari	This <i>Neverwinter Nights</i> expansion has almost enough content to qualify as a new game itself.	9
No One Lives Forever	Vivendi Universal	Austin Powers ain't got nothing on Cat Archer, the hottest digital chick with a gun since that old hag Lara Croft.	8
No One Lives Forever 2	Vivendi Universal	As funny and stylish as the original '60s spy spoof (if that's even possible), and more fun to play, too.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis	Codemasters	One of the highest original series of combat sims, this soldier/flight/tank sim went on to win COW's 2001 Game of the Year award.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	Codemasters	Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion for a classic overlooked game.	9
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	Ubisoft	The command interface and character A.I. have been revamped, but this runs slowly on anything but a high-end rig.	8
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	It's not the greatest RTS game we've played, but the nation-building aspect makes <i>Rise of Nations</i> especially appealing.	9
Sacrifice	Interplay	Action/strategy hybrid blends the conventions of all the genres it touches, while making for a fantastically original multiplayer experience.	8
Sid Meier's Sim Golf	Electronic Arts	Sim Golf will have you laying out golf courses and building resorts like a virtual Robert Trent Jones.	9
Silent Storm	Encore	Did-school turn-based gameplay meets new-school 3D destructibility.	9
The Sims	Electronic Arts	It's impossible to categorize EA's addictive superbustle/life simulator, just like it's impossible to stop playing it.	10
The Sims: Hot Date	Electronic Arts	Gamers everywhere, rejoice! Finally, a game where you can actually learn a thing or two about interacting with the opposite sex!	9
Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	Yeah, the lightsaber battles are sweet, but Lando's cameo just about seals the deal. And is his ship fly or what?	9
Star Wars: Galactic Republic	LucasArts	The best thing to happen to the Star Wars franchise since <i>The Empire Strikes Back</i> . And the best RPG we've played in years.	10
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). <i>Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004</i> makes golf cool (sort of).	9
Tron 2.0	Buena Vista	For our younger readers, we recommend renting the original <i>Tron</i> , waiting 20 years, and then playing this game.	8
Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne	Vivendi Universal	Adds a single-player campaign to <i>Warcraft III</i> that isn't so moody and serious. There are some new multiplayer units as well.	8
Warlords Battle II	Ubisoft	RTS and RPG, two great flavors that go well together—especially when combined with a big, gnarly wizard's staff!	8

[BUY!]

CIVILIZATION III: CONQUESTS

A fixture of PC gaming for 13 years, the *Civilization* series continues to entrance would-be conquerors.



[AVOID!]

DEAD TO RIGHTS

The not-great Xbox title didn't get any better when ported to PC—and its annoying auto-aim feature is maddeningly intact.



➔ XBOX TOP 50 NOW WITH 100% MORE BOND

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	EAIR RATING
Armed & Dangerous	LucasArts	Tea-drinking robots and guns that fire sharks. What else could you possibly ask for?	9
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Vivendi Universal	A beautiful-looking <i>Dungeons & Dragons</i> -based hack-n-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	Rayman creator Michel Ancel has done it again: <i>BGE</i> is a spectacular adventure.	9
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An arcade racer with an emphasis on spectacular crashes, which—now that we think about it—defeats the purpose of competitive racing.	8
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge	Microsoft	The single-player mode might last you a day, but the online dogfighting lasts for an eternity. Or maybe just a few months.	9
Dead or Alive 3	Tecmo	It's not the deepest of fighters, but it definitely competes for the best-looking prize. Plus, the girls are back in all their bouncy glory.	8
Dead or Alive 3: Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Tecmo	Pro tip: When playing <i>DOAXBV</i> , have your TV remote handy. If Mom bursts in, hit the surf button and flip to the History Channel. She'll be proud.	8
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	<i>Invisible War</i> , much like the first <i>Deus Ex</i> , is a game whose better moments far outweigh its lesser ones.	9
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	An exhaustive open-ended RPG that essentially allows you to make it up as you go along, with hundreds of people to talk to.	8
ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega	It's the best-looking basketball game this year, and it's marginally the best-playing one, too.	8
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top Madden.	9
ESPN NHL Hockey	Sega	The game formerly known as <i>NHL 2K1x</i> , where <i>1x</i> is the last digit of the year we're in. Oh yeah, it's still really good.	8
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Containing both <i>Grand Theft Auto III</i> and <i>Grand Theft Auto: Vice City</i> , this is the value of the year. Now go get your mob on.	10
Halo	Microsoft	The definitive reason to own an Xbox. There are plenty of secondary reasons, sure, but no Xbox owner should be without <i>Halo</i> .	10
High Heat 2004	300	The best baseball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	Electronic Arts	Not a cheap cash-in, but not quite <i>GoldenEye</i> .	8
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	<i>Jet Set Radio Future</i> has substance and an overabundance of style. Sega simplified tagging in favor of a more robust trick system.	8
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best <i>LOTR</i> effort, an improvement on <i>The Two Towers</i> that looks fantastic.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
MechAssault	Microsoft	It's a good single-player game, but it really shines on Xbox Live, where you're pitted against other mech pilots.	8
MotGP 2	THQ	What we said: "Can only be described as the best motorcycle-racing sim on the planet." What more do you need?	9
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of <i>Live</i> ? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Ever better than the first, <i>Vol. 2</i> takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent <i>NCAA 2003</i> , added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NFL Street	Electronic Arts	It's like football, except more fun.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
Ninja Gaiden	Tecmo	Itagaki's long-awaited and much-anticipated ode to the ninja is absolutely stunning.	9
Onigiri: Myth of Demons	Sega	<i>Onigiri</i> boasts some of the finest artistic touches you'll find on Xbox. Oh, the slice-n-dice, destroy-everything gameplay is fun, too.	8
Panzer Dragoon Orta	Sega	Aesthetically beautiful and a dream to play. See what Saturn owners were enjoying seven years ago (the original <i>Panzer Dragoon</i> is included).	9
Phantom Crash	Phantagram	Xbox certainly isn't lacking in mech titles. The quirky, unique <i>Phantom Crash</i> has upgradeable mechs and a story-driven one-player mode.	9
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic. If only the camera were more manageable.	9
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	A great racer with the best implementation of online features to date. Plus, <i>Geometry Wars</i> !	9
RalliSport Challenge	Microsoft	This rally racer is one of the best examples of Xbox's power. More arcade than simulation, with enough depth to please both camps.	8
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Titles of War	Activision	The single-player missions still aren't much to write home about, but at least you can play them with a pal. The online play is gray.	8
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good Simpsons game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best <i>SSX</i> yet.	8
Star Wars: Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	As usual, the <i>Star Wars</i> universe inspires great aesthetic design to complement Raven Software's solid sense of game design.	8
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	The best thing to happen to the <i>Star Wars</i> franchise since <i>The Empire Strikes Back</i> , and the best RPG we've played in years.	10
Street Battlezone	Capcom	If you want to play this game, you have to shell out \$200 for the massive controller. For those with the cash, it's well worth it.	8
Soul Calibur II	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as <i>VF4: Evolution</i> .	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	<i>Tiger Woods</i> made golf cool [sort of]. <i>Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004</i> makes golf games cool [sort of].	9
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Everything good about the <i>IPSP2</i> original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes.	8
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	Tactical shooting at its almost best. Best played cooperatively over the Net with some friends. Or sworn enemies.	8
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	Comparisons to <i>Metal Gear Solid</i> were inevitable. <i>Splinter Cell</i> holds its own and even outdoes Konami's behemoth at times.	9
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of <i>Tony Hawk's</i> customizable gameplay make it the best <i>Hawk</i> yet.	10
Top Spin	Microsoft	Microsoft liked <i>Virtua Tennis</i> so much, it went and made its own version...and it's better.	8
Unreal Championship	Atari	Mindless deathmarching with great weapon design and entertaining multiplayer modes, including the sportlike bombing run.	8
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the <i>Tony Hawk</i> formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	8
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega	<i>WSB2K3</i> is the best-looking baseball game and it has a great franchise mode, but it's got A.I. issues that still need to be worked out.	8

[BUY!]

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

➔ The hottest Xbox game right now, *Pandora Tomorrow* is today's big thing and should still be good tomorrow, too.



[AVOID!]

AUTO MODELLISTA

➔ If you want the challenge of a racing game with cars that are impossible to control, this is your game. If you're sane, though, stay away.



GAMECUBE TOP 50 WELCOME, TWIN SNAKES

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	The game that never ends is based largely on routine chores, yard work, and interior decorating. So why is it so much fun to play?	9
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	Rayman creator Michel Ancel has done it again: BB&E is a spectacular adventure.	9
Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	Sega	Sonic Team cracked a few eggs and whipped up a great new platformer. Yeah, that was lame. Sorry.	9
Bomberman Generation	Majesco	A surviving member of the old school, Bomberman has earned some tenure in the industry. This time, he sports a cel-shaded look.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	The best-looking—and best-playing—racer on the system. Be prepared to spend many hours in crash mode.	8
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	Nintendo	This game, if you let it, will mess with your head. The insanity effects are clever (like the first time), and the scenery is downright creepy.	9
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Unfortunately, F-Zero GX doesn't include vomit bags. Or the AX arcade machine. One of those would have been nice.	8
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	A true Final Fantasy? It matters not. This action-RPG is fantastic when played with friends.	8
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	J.K. Rowling's fantasy sport is surprisingly playable in videogame form. We wonder what Sega's ESPN Quidditch would be like...	8
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Natsume	Fun game, but does anyone else think it's strange that you can nuzzle your farm animals but not your wife?	8
High Heat 2004	300	The best baseball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	Electronic Arts	Not a cheap cash-in, but not quite GoldenEye.	8
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	It looks and feels like the best Zelda game ever, but sailing back and forth in the overworld just feels like work.	9
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best LOTR effort, an improvement on The Two Towers that looks fantastic.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	The only thing missing is Mario hurling his 4-iron into the pond while screaming obscenities. Oh well, next time.	9
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	The Mario Kart legacy remains intact, offering a highly enjoyable co-op mode and great track design.	10
Mario Party 4	Nintendo	There are few things better in life than three friends, Mario Party, and a healthy flow of alcoholic beverages (if you're legal, of course).	8
Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	Konami	Metal Gear magic with drastically improved AI, and first-person shooting.	9
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	As if they dissected Super Metroid, added a dimension, and put it back together again with slick graphics. In fact, it's exactly like that.	10
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of Live? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	9
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, Vol. 2 takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent NCAA 2003, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NFL Street	Electronic Arts	It's like football, except more fun.	9
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
NHL Hitz Pro	Midway	It's not realistic, but it's the closest we'll ever get to a new Ice Hockey or Blades of Steel.	8
Pac-Man Vs.	Namco	More than 20 years after the game's release, GMR reviews Pac-Man. It's sort of good, we guess.	8
Phantasy Star Online: Episode I & II	Sega	Unhealthily addictive. The pursuit of rare items helps one ignore the somewhat repetitive battles (and the \$9 monthly fee).	9
Pokémon	Nintendo	Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto got the idea for this quirky strategy game from observing his personal garden. What kind of garden?	9
Pokemon Colosseum	Nintendo	Can an edgy design and 3D Pokémon in dual battles woo back those Pokémonians?	9
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...it only the camera were more manageable.	9
Resident Evil	Capcom	This remake could almost be described as a new game. But it is really Resident Evil without the laughably bad voice acting?	9
Resident Evil II	Capcom	This one actually is a brand-new game, with significant changes, such as disposable items and the dirty-sounding partner swapping.	9
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good Simpsons game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	9
The Sims: Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	All the familiar goodness of The Sims, but now with branching career paths, two-player co-op, and more.	9
Skies of Arcadia: Legends	Sega	If you missed it on Dreamcast—and many of you did—you've been given a second chance. It's even got new characters.	9
Soul Calibur II	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as VF4: Evolution's.	9
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA dishes individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best SSX yet.	9
Star Wars: Rogue Squadron II	LucasArts	At times, Rogue Squadron II syncs closely with scenes from the movies. Impressive when you consider it took only nine months to make.	9
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	Maybe not quite as groundbreaking as Super Mario 64, but even when Nintendo "misses," it makes a big splash.	9
Super Monkey Ball	Sega	Monkeys in balls! An exceptional game based on a simple concept, some of the later levels will eat you for lunch.	8
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Even more monkeys in balls running around for your entertainment! The extra game modes add quite a bit to the simple concept.	8
Super Smash Bros. Melee	Nintendo	A Nintendo fanatic's dream, if only for the exhaustive gallery of collectible Nintendo characters. Plus, you can beat the crap out of Jigglypuff.	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004 makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater	Activision	The depth and versatility of THUG's customizable gameplay make it the best Hawk yet.	10
Ultimate Muscle	Bandai	If the soap-opera antics of the WWE don't go far enough over the top, perhaps the weekly Ultimate Muscle will be more to your liking.	9
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	A refreshingly original platformer/bravler with an outstanding art style and rock-solid mechanics.	9
Wave Race: Blue Storm	Nintendo	Great wave physics, awesome weather effects, and a deeper control scheme than the original. An underrated gem of a racer.	8
WWE Wrestlemania X8	THQ	Ratings have cooled and Stone Cold has had some run-ins with John Law, but that's irrelevant, as wrestling games will always sell.	8

[BUY!]

HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE

➔ For those finally getting sick of *Animal Crossing*, here's another town to putter around in for a year or so.



[AVOID]

YU-GI-OH! THE FALSEBOUND KINGDOM

➔ Tedious, lacking strategy or good gameplay of any sort. But at least there are cool visuals. Oh, wait—those suck, too.



→ GBA TOP 50 A BIG STATUS QUO

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	SNES RATING
Advance Wars	Nintendo	Turn-based military strategy that should be a part of everyone's GBA library. Once you get sucked in, it's hard to pull yourself away.	8
Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	Wars 2 only adds a single new unit, but it's chock-full of new maps, terrain, and CD powers.	8
Baseball Advance	THQ	There are only four stadiums and no multiplayer, but it's still a great game of baseball.	8
Boktai: The Sun Is in Your Hand	Konami	It's gonna be a bright [bright], brilliant sun-shiny day. Well, it had damn well better be.	8
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	Konami	Better sound and castle design than <i>Harmony of Dissonance</i> , but much too short. The soul system is ace, though.	8
Castlevania: Circle of the Moon	Konami	Castlevania is meant to be played in two dimensions, and this game shows why. A complex card system governs your special abilities.	7
Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance	Konami	The second Castlevania is one of the best reasons to own a Game Boy Advance. The colors are brighter and the bosses are bigger.	7
Chu Chu Rocket!	Sega	A highly addictive and highly cute puzzle-action game from Sega that's best played with multiple friends. Mouse mania!	7
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	If <i>Advance Wars</i> and <i>Final Fantasy Tactics</i> fell in love and had a baby, they'd call it <i>Fire Emblem</i> .	8
F-Zero: Maximum Velocity	Nintendo	A new F-Zero based on the classic SNES game, with improved graphics, new tracks, and four-player support.	8
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Square Enix	At long last, we have a new <i>Final Fantasy Tactics</i> —and it's absolutely spectacular. Set aside 60 hours of free time....	7
Final Fight One	Capcom	Another enhanced port of an SNES original. How come mayors of large cities don't go on ass-kicking rampages anymore?	8
Golden Sun	Nintendo	A deep combat engine and brilliant graphics make this one of the better RPGs available on GBA.	8
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Picks up right where the first one left off. The battle system remains basically unchanged, but the puzzles are much more rewarding.	8
Gradius Galaxies	Konami	Konami's classic shooter series translates to the portable very well. Great graphics and plenty of challenge.	7
GT Advance 3	THQ	The <i>GT Advance</i> series has always been technically marvelous, and <i>GT3</i> (yeah, we know! finally) has a battery-save function!	8
Gully Gear X Advance	Sammy	Not surprisingly, the animation and soundtrack take a hit, but it still plays like its big brother versions.	7
Kirby: Nightmare in Dreamland	Nintendo	A remake of the NES classic Kirby's Adventure with updated graphics and multiplayer support.	8
Klonoa: Empire of Dreams	Namco	Straying from the original formula, this <i>Klonoa</i> is more of a puzzle game than a platformer, with great graphics and sound.	8
Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past	Nintendo	Invite three friends over and you've got a bona fide <i>Zelda</i> party. Drink red medicine till you puke and skinny-dip in Lake Hyli!	8
Lufia: The Ruins of Lore	Atlus	Periodically overshadowed by Square's offerings, the <i>Lufia</i> series is just as engaging as <i>Final Fantasy</i> . It's also more challenging.	8
Lunar Legend	Ubisoft	The anime cut-scenes and superb voice acting may be gone, but the great Lunar gameplay and story remain intact.	8
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	It's the only place you'll find the Tanooka, and that's reason enough to buy this stellar land N!arlorian RPG.	7
Mario Kart: Super Circuit	Nintendo	A balanced blend of <i>Super Mario Kart</i> and <i>Mario Kart 64</i> that even includes all the tracks from the former.	8
Mega Man Battle Network 2	Capcom	More of an RPG than a platformer, the <i>Battle Network</i> series is a nice change of pace for Mega Man and pals.	8
Mega Man Battle Network 3	Capcom	<i>Battle Network 3</i> is pretty much more of the same with a few minor additions, but it's already a great series.	8
Mega Man Zero	Capcom	A difficult yet engaging installment of the X-side story that is played with Zero, who is equipped with an arm cannon and beamsaber.	7
Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	The follow-up to <i>Super Metroid</i> is eight years late, but the wait was well worth it. An adventure that ends way too quickly.	7
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	True to its roots, with an expanded and finessed story.	7
Ninja Five-G	Konami	A challenging platformer that brings back fond memories of <i>Bionic Commando</i> , complete with throwing stars and katanas.	7
Phantasy Star Collection	THQ	Straightforward classic RPG action that's been overlooked for far too long. Includes <i>Phantasy Star 1, 2, and 3</i> .	7
Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo	Ahead from 2-on-2 battles, the first GBA <i>Pokémon</i> combo doesn't really change the original formula.	7
Rayman Advance	Ubisoft	Rayman is just as good in 2D as he is in 3D. It looks great and provides a decent challenge.	8
The Sims Bustle! Out	Electronic Arts	The chance for a more successful life is in the palm of your hand.	8
Sonic Advance 2	THQ	<i>Sonic Advance 2</i> is much improved over the first one, and it connects to GameCube's <i>Sonic Adventure</i> games to boot.	8
Sonic Pinball Party	Sega	Not limited to just hedgehogs, Sega's solid pinballer features tables from the classics <i>Nights</i> and <i>Samba de Amigo</i> .	8
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Capcom	Sure, the limiting button configuration prevents <i>SFA3</i> from being a completely accurate port, but it's better nonetheless.	7
Super Dodgeball Advance	Atlus	You're not going to find that many dodgeball games on the market, so thankfully, this one is worthwhile. Better in multiplayer.	7
Super Ghouls & Ghosts	Capcom	Remember how frustrated you got playing through <i>Ghouls & Ghosts</i> ? Get ready to do it all over again.	8
Super Mario Advance: Super Mario 2	Nintendo	Aside from the odd naming system, you can't really complain about a portable version of <i>Super Mario Bros. 2</i> .	8
Super Mario Advance 2: Mario World	Nintendo	There's really not much else that can be said except "portable <i>Super Mario World</i> " and "you should buy it."	7
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	Yoshi is the star of this show, one of the greatest 2D platformers ever put to silicon. There are even a couple of new bonus levels.	7
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	THQ	An excellent port of the game that sold many a GameCube. THQ even included <i>Monkey Bowling</i> and <i>Monkey Fight</i> !	8
Super Puzzle Fighter II	Capcom	Sometimes, you just get bored with Tetris. <i>Puzzle Fighter II</i> is a fantastic port of a fantastic and highly addictive game. Buy it now.	8
Super Street Fighter II	Capcom	The combo of <i>SFA3</i> , <i>Gully Gear X Advance</i> , and <i>Super Street Fighter II</i> is devastating. And you don't even need any quarters!	8
Tactics Ogre: The Knights of Lodis	Atlus	An incredibly deep strategy-RPG with a branching story line and a rewarding battle system.	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	It's amazing how Activision managed to cram <i>Tony Hawk</i> into a cartridge while keeping the essence of the console version intact.	8
Virtua Tennis	THQ	A surprisingly faithful rendition of the console versions with good visuals and an engaging court tour mode. The best tennis on GBA.	8
Wario Land 4	Nintendo	The <i>Wario</i> series of platformers has always been excellent, and this one is no exception. Short but incredibly sweet.	8
WarioWare, Inc.	Nintendo	A large collection of microgames fuels <i>WarioWare's</i> madcap mayhem. The freshest game we've seen in a long time.	9

[BUY]

HARVEST MOON: FRIENDS OF MINERAL TOWN

→ If you take our advice and buy *Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life* for GameCube, you can link up with *Mineral Town*. You can never have too much produce, right?



[AVOID]

DR. SEUSS' THE CAT IN THE HAT

→ It's imperative that you boycott any *Cat in the Hat* media-based properties before someone decides to sign up Mike Myers for Green Eggs and Ham.





DAME GEEZER

SHE'S OLD!
SHE'S PISSED!

THE BETTER HALF (?) SPEAKS OUT ON REAL BODIES

➔ "Hi there, Mr. Geezer! How are you today?"

MISTER Geezer? Whaddya mean, Mr. Geezer? You boys lookin' for an ass whoopin'?

"Whoah! Sorry, Mrs. Geezer! We thought you were your husband!"

My husband? Whaddya call these things here? Grapefruits? You boys need some glasses, or an anatomy lesson! I knew you were all stupid, but good lord! Go rent yourselves a couple R-rated movies and come back when you've learned a little something about life! My word!

"We're sorry, Mrs. Geezer, it's just, well...no offense and all...but look at you."

Mind yourselves, now. I may be old, but I'm still a woman. I've got my pride. And that ain't all I've got, neither. I've got my trusty pump-action double-barreled shotgun on my rocker over there, and I ain't afraid to fetch it! So, go on! Gitt! Gitt off my porch here before I get mad!

"But wait! We're serious, Mrs. Geezer! You know, it's just, uh-huh, well, you don't look like—"

Like what?!! Wait, lemme guess. Like the bimbo with the big knockers on the cover of this magazine?

"Well...yeah!"

I shoulda known. You're gamers, aren't ya? Course you are! Look at ya! Spaghetti arms, flabby guts, droopy shoulders—I'd recognize ya anywhere! Just like that weak, bony-assed husband of mine! When's the last time any of you turned off your electronic gizmos and got some sunlight, anyway? Y'all look like a scurvy ward or Dawn of the Dead here!

"Can we leave now?"

No, ya can't leave now! Now ya got me goin'. So sit down, shut up, and learn yourselves something for a change.

These videogames are nothin' but trouble when it comes to women. You may want to get your head out of your games for two seconds now and then, buster, and look around ya. Because if you think the future Mrs. Dumbass, or whatever your name is, is going to look anything like the girls in your


dumb little games, with torpedo-sized mammaries and a perky little behind poking out of little leather bondage outfits not big enough to cover a mouse, then I got some news for ya: You're stupider than ya look! And that's saying something! Might as well just lay down in the street right now, boy, and pray a semi comes by and runs you over right quick, because otherwise you got a long life of misery and disappointment ahead of you.

I'm tired of it, I tell ya. Games made by boys, for boys, none of whom seem to have any clue how a real woman is actually put together. Probably because the last time they ever saw a real one naked, they were nursing with their mamas! Look at this Nina girl on the cover of this magazine again. Go on, I'll wait. Ya back? Now tell me: When's the last time you saw an actual female built like that? You ever hear of gravity? How about body fat? And how about putting some real clothes on, for Pete's sake?

You know what I'd like to see? A videogame with a hot, hunky boy toy, prancing around in a leather G-string, shaking his

tush for me. Ohhh, yeah, honey. Shoot that gun. Bend waay over. Show me what ya got, boy!

Makes ya nervous does it? Don't like it, do ya?

Welcome to my world, boys. 



WHEN'S THE LAST TIME YOU SAW AN ACTUAL FEMALE BUILT LIKE THAT?



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JEAN RENO AND TAKESHI KANESHIRO

TWO HEROES, ONE DESTINY

500 BC

500 AD

1500 AD

1100 BC



THE FINAL BATTLE BEGINS.

Starring international acting sensations, Jean Reno as Jacques Blanc and Takeshi Kaneshiro as Sramanosuke, Onimusha 3: Demon Siege is the final chapter in the Onimusha Trilogy. Two heroes from different lands, travel through time and space to defeat the evil Nobunaga and his hordes of darkness. Control the fate of both men as you journey from 16th Century Japan to modern day Paris and back. The final chapter in the Onimusha trilogy begins.



Blood and Gore
Intense Violence



PlayStation 2

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